MUDIE'S LIBRARY,
510, NEW OXFORD STREET
AND 20, MUSEUM STREET.
SINGLE SUBSCRIPTION,
One Guinea Per Annum

THE CARDINAL.

—

VOL. III.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/cardinal00boyd_1

THE CARDINAL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE DUCHESS,"

&c &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1854.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

THE CARDINAL.

CHAPTER I.

THE CASTLE OF SEGOVIA.

"THERE are no beautiful prisons," is a favourite proverb in Spain; but if we take it in its literal sense, few countries present better evidence of its falsity. About thirty miles north of Madrid, on the extreme verge of the broken ranges of the Guadarama, is a steep and narrow ridge, running from east to west, and bounded on its northern side by the Eresma, and on the south by a brook called El Clamores, or "The Noisy Water." From the banks of the two rivers, rocks rise precipitously, forming a natural wall, and, from

the facilities they offer for defence, probably, in the first instance, suggesting the idea of the future fortress. On the summit, and at the extreme west end of the ridge, may still be seen in strong relief against the sky, a venerable pile, grey with age. To the eastward rises its lofty donjon, the work of the Goths; while the western portion of the building, in its pointed towers and numerous minarets, still exhibits traces of its Moorish origin The natural charms of the surrounding scenery—the sparkling streams, with their banks clothed with timber—the lofty and frowning rock—the gay spires and massy keep—together with a thousand inequalities of outline, supplied by outer walls and the buildings of numerous court-yards, present, in their combination, a romantic beauty never surpassed, and rarely equalled. Yet such was, and is, the Castle of Segovia, the state prison of Spain, erected as if to give the lie to the proverb of the country, which denies that prisons can be beautiful.

The apartments of the Duke of Escalona were in one of the inner court-yards. They were on the ground-floor, and entered from

the court-yard itself; but their windows looked northward beyond the boundary of the fortress, and down the narrow valley through which the Eresma pours its waters to the Douro.

The wing of the chateau in which the duke was lodged stood about twenty feet from the edge of the precipice, and that in its turn was bounded by a low wall, which followed the irregular outline of the crag, and was ornamented here and there by vases coarsely carved out of the stone of which the wall was formed, and probably introduced for the purpose of breaking the formality of its outline. The narrow space which lay between the parapet and the castle itself, had been laid out in a terrace-walk, bordered on the side next the rock, by turf and flower-beds. Beyond, the cliff sunk perpendicularly to the waters of the Eresma.

The quarters of the duke were handsome. The fortress had originally, under Alonzo VI., King of Castile been the residence of royalty, and some of the best of its apartments had been placed at the disposal of the Grand Chamberlain. The suite consisted of seven or eight rooms running along the terrace, and

communicating with it by a doorway, so as to give to the noble prisoner the power of taking air and exercise at pleasure. The interior, if not comfortably furnished, retained at least its ancient decorations, and the rooms possessed, that rare luxury in the Peninsula, chimneys; but the conquering descendants of Pelayo had come from a cold region, and they brought with them the accessories its inhospitable temperature had rendered necessary. The general use of the brazier, so universal in Central and Southern Spain, ever bespeaks the lengthened presence of the sun, and is intended only as a make-shift, during the short period of his absence.

Therese, for the second time, entered the walls of her grandfather's prison. She was the messenger of sorrow, and yet she found enough on the spot to give her ground for anxiety. Pride was the besetting sin of the house of Pacheco; and the Grand Chamberlain had in no degree derogated from his race. To one so haughty and high-spirited, it can be easily understood how overwhelming a calamity was his imprisonment. The mere confinement was nothing. The weight of the blow was in the disgrace. To think

that he, Don John Pacheco, the first officer of the court, the man who had been viceroy of many provinces, the representative of a line distinguished for centuries, should be consigned to what he called and considered a dungeon, was bitter enough; but the draught had been made infinitely more nauseous by the recollection that he was indebted for his degradation to a paltry foreign priest, the son of a gardener at Parma, the pander to the vices of the Duke of Vendome, the sycophant of the Princess of Ursins, the favourite of the Queen and her master. This irritation of feeling, strengthened as it was not only by his natural temperament, but by his great age, had become every hour more violent. It had at length produced its natural results. The duke became ill. It was in vain that his medical attendant, who had been permitted to follow him, exhausted the resources of his art; the old man grew gradually worse and worse, and at length took to his bed.

It was there Therese found him on her return from Madrid; but she brought no consolation to the invalid. On her entering the room the duke had looked eagerly in her face,

but without speaking. It was unnecessary. His grandchild's expressive features sufficiently told the tale of her failure. As for herself, she said nothing of her visit or its results. As yet her aged relative only suspected that the King had refused to see him; but he dreamed nothing of the approaching trial, and his granddaughter felt thankful that he had asked no questions. Had he done so she would have felt it unworthy to deceive him; and yet to inform him of the future disgrace would be to kill him.

Still, though she brought no agreeable intelligence, the presence of the girl by his bedside did the old man service. It is in the hour of sorrow that women appear to the most advantage. Few can bear prosperity. If we examine the annals of history, or listen to the gossip of present life, it is a strange fact, but not the less a true one, that those of the softer sex who have most distinguished themselves by their folly or their vices are precisely those to whom Heaven has been most kind; on whom it has lavished health and wealth and beauty, and adoring relatives and distinguished or trusting husbands. It is

not so with those of their sisters whose lot has been more clouded. To woman more especially the uses of adversity are sweet. As fire proves gold, it developes her energies and her virtues; and when misfortunes do come, and the mind and body of her stronger helpmate sink beneath them, then it is that she rises superior to their influence; then, what hand but hers can smoothe so gently the pillow of sickness? what lips but hers can whisper so comfortably the hope of a brighter future to despair?

It was by such offices of affection that Therese gradually brought a calm to the bosom of her aged relative.

Her grandfather in some degree recovered his spirits. Sorrow, too, seemed to have softened his heart; for though he still carefully avoided speaking of the causes of his imprisonment, or its probable duration, he entered more largely than formerly into the interests of his grandchild. It might possibly be to produce forgetfulness of his own calamities that he now, for the first time, questioned her largely upon the manner in which she had spent the year of her absence in France; of the names and number of her acquaintances, and the appearance of the

distinguished persons with whom she had been brought in contact. Then, too, followed the details of her journey. Therese concealed nothing. She told of Clifford's first appearance at Irun, of the attack of Don Ambrosio, and the rescue: of Clifford's capture, and visit to the Moorish tower, and the abstraction of his papers; of their accidental meeting in the Calle de los Cuchilleros; her flight through the garden; her enforced interview, her hiding him behind the tapestry, and his discovery.

The duke listened to everything, and with undisguised interest. His grandchild would have given worlds to know if he suspected her new-born liking towards her soldier relative; but if such suspicion existed, the old man said nothing from which she could form an opinion. One thing, however, was certain—the narrative had awakened no displeasure. It was possible that he had penetrated his grandchild's feelings, and was anxious to avoid any expression which might pain them. It was possible that regret for his own violence in the banqueting-room had disposed him, like all violent men, to go to the other extreme, and show to the young envoy an equally extravagant kindness. Both

causes might have had their influence; but it is probable that nothing contributed so much to his new feelings of charity as the discovery of the relationship of his fellow-captive.

The Duke of Escalona was a true Spaniard. He considered a grandee the most important person upon earth, and next to him a grandee's relatives. Besides, he had strong affections, and more especially was passionately attached to his mother's family. Thus the young soldier had a double claim upon his likings. By the mother's side at least he was a Spaniard. He was more—he was a Zuniga, descended, like the duke himself, from a house which had always been celebrated as one of the most distinguished of Castile, and which had been ennobled in half a dozen different branches.

Whatever was the cause of the softening of the old man's heart, it produced results which Donna Teresa could not have anticipated.

"My child," said he to her, as she sat by the bedside on the second day after her return, "we have an act of justice to perform, and the sooner we discharge it the better. Our unfortunate relative—how did you call him?"

"Colonel Clifford, grandpapa," said the young lady, blushing deeply.

"Yes; Colonel Clifford, my love, is a prisoner like ourselves, and I cannot help thinking that to us he, in some degree, owes his captivity; for if I understand you aright, it was to aid me that the Princess of Ursins had him despatched from Paris. It is true that I have not felt, and do not feel, disposed to accept of his services. Still that is no fault of the lad's, and it is hard that he should suffer for what some would call my perverseness. Perhaps, too," continued the old man, with a quiet smile, "a young lady of my acquaintance has been to blame; for I cannot help thinking that the cavalier would not have so madly thrust his head into the lion's den, unless the eyes of the damsel whom he followed, had some time or other looked on him with more kindness than they should have done. But you need not colour so violently, my love; and I will save you the trouble of making so many protestations. It would be folly in a portionless cadet looking with affection upon the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain; but still, in one who has the blood of Zuniga in his veins, the

admiration has not that extravagant insolence in it which I once believed. So, as he is a relative, we must treat him with the civility to which he is entitled. I cannot, to be sure, in my dungeon receive him with the prince-like hospitalities which I could have offered him at Madrid. But even here I doubt not he will be glad to exchange the solitude of his own apartment for our society; and my old friend Juan Sanchez will, at my request, grant him the privilege."

With the words the duke touched a hand-bell which stood on the table near him, and, through the medium of an attendant, requested the presence of the alcayde. Don Juan soon appeared, and at once gave his consent to the wishes of his distinguished guest.

"My chief," said he, "the Conde de Chincon, the hereditary governor of the castle, is now absent; but I am satisfied that I only follow his wishes, in gratifying the desire of the Grand Chamberlain. I shall be happy to conduct Colonel Clifford hither."

"You will do more, Sanchez," said the old man. "The young fellow chances to be a relative of mine; so you will even give to him as to

me, the privilege of walking on the terrace. The poor boy, I dare say, would be glad enough to breathe the air of heaven."

"Nothing can be more easy, your excellency. The staircase which leads to the chamber of the English prisoner communicates with the hall from which enter your apartments. I will leave the caballero's room open, though, for my own sake," continued he, with a smile, "I must turn key upon the great door which leads from the hall to the court-yard. Colonel Clifford can thus make his way to the terrace at pleasure. At ten o'clock, however, your excellency, we lock up, and the young caballero must once more return to his quarters; but till that hour, and during the day, he will be to all intents and purposes free, as far, at least, as the terrace is concerned, and the apartments in this wing of the château."

"You are kind, Don Juan," said the old noble, "most kind; and now, when the siesta is over, do me the favour to conduct hither your other prisoner."

The alcayde retired. At two hours after mid-day he again re-entered the chamber, bringing Clifford along with him; and the young soldier

was thus once more introduced to the lady of his love, and by a train of circumstances which neither he nor she had ever contemplated, by the permission—nay, more, at the special request—of her redoubtable grandsire.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF A CAMERERA MAYOR.

The old noble, as his visitor entered, half raised himself from the pillow, and courteously extended his hand.

"Good morning, Colonel Clifford," said he, "or rather good morning, Don Carlos Zuniga. With the envoy of England I as liege subject of Don Philip, can hold no conference; the more especially," continued he, laughing, "as it could only refer to unpleasant reminiscences. With my trusty and well-beloved cousin it is different. Here you shall be known only as Don Carlos Zuniga, and you have a legal right to the title. For in Spain,

honours, estates, grandeeships are all, as the French say, *en quenouille;* or in other words, a mother transmits to her offspring, rank, wealth, name, as readily as we, the lords of the creation. So again, I bid my relative welcome to the residence of the Grand Chamberlain." And the invalid once more took the hand of Clifford and shook it kindly.

The duke rather prided himself on his eloquence, and he doubted not, that upon the present occasion he had delivered an address, loyal to the King, honourable to himself, courteous to his guest, and gratifying to the feelings of his granddaughter. It might have possessed all these qualities, but to say the truth, it was scarcely listened to. Had Demosthenes himself delivered it, it would have met with no better fate. The eyes of Clifford, in spite of his efforts to command his attention, were fixed on Therese, and the young lady, though she affected to gaze steadily on the floor, with that mystic knowledge which belongs so invariably to women, when the object of admiration, was evidently

conscious of his gaze and coloured beneath it.

It was possible that the duke saw the embarrassment of his relatives, or it might be that he was under the influence of his newborn feeling of courtesy, for he once more broke silence.

"Let me make you," said he, "acquainted with my granddaughter, Donna Teresa Pacheco. But I had forgotten," added he, with a meaning smile, "you have met before, and she has informed me that she has received an important service at your hand."

Clifford hastened to say that the aid he had rendered he had performed with pleasure.

"It may be so," said the duke, "but we are not the less your debtors. It is the only happy result that has flowed from the diplomacy of our old friend the Princess of Ursins."

"Ah!" said Therese with a sigh, "what would my poor grand-aunt say if she could contemplate us now, and know the utter failure of her plans."

"Say, love, what she has said a thousand times before, 'Patience and shuffle the cards.'

One who has spent life as she has done, amid the changing fortunes of court favour, is too well acquainted with the game to expect to trump every trick. It is the Cardinal's luck to-day; it may be her's to-morrow. You come into Spain, lad," continued he, turning to Clifford, "as the apparent representative of the wishes of two kingdoms. You little knew you were but the agent of a woman's vengeance!"

"Her injury was a mortal one, and it is natural that it should make itself recollected even after so long an interval."

"It was. It destroyed at a blow the hopes, the fortunes, the ambition of a life. But I see that you have heard the story."

"I am but slightly acquainted with it, and, indeed, merely with its outlines."

"Then listen to its details; and with the greater attention, as the events I am about to relate affect us. But for them you, and I, and my grandchild, would not to-day have been at Segovia."

And the old noble, by the assistance of his fair descendant, sat up in bed, and after having

his back carefully supported by additional pillows, spoke as follows :—

"You know my sovereign, Philip V. married when but seventeen, on his succession to the crown of Spain, Maria Louisa Gabriela, a daughter of the Duke of Savoy, some three years his junior. Our relative, the Princess of Ursins, then a woman of thirty, was appointed by Louis XIV.—the grandfather of the King—to the post of Camerera Mayor, or, in fact, of nurse to the royal children. The selection was an admirable one. The noble lady discharged well her duty, and amid the changeful fortunes of the War of the Succession, supported the weaker courage of the young sovereigns. Both were well aware of the benefits they owed her, and both repaid her with the most ample confidence and gratitude. During the whole of the life of the Savoyarde, as our first Queen was termed, the princess ruled the kingdom; and we—for my eldest son married her niece, the mother of Therese—shared her honours and rejoiced in her prosperity.

"But darker times came. The Savoyarde

died, and Louis XIV. commanded that his grandson should marry again. The princess herself might have shared his throne; for time, and habit, and gratitude, and the companionship of many years had produced strong affection; but she nobly refused a prize which was within her grasp, and which, to a woman of her great ambition, must have been so fascinating. She refused the King's vows. Philip, by her counsel, decided on marrying the daughter of some sovereign house, and the Princess of Ursins herself was asked to make the selection.

"At that time there was at the court of Spain, a priest—an abbé of the name of Alberoni. He was poor, friendless, unknown. He had originally been a gardener's boy at Parma, and had afterwards become, successively, cook, buffoon, and companion to the Duke of Vendome, and followed his patron into Spain. There the duke died suddenly, and his parasite had once more to commence the ladder of life. He had no means of returning to his own country, and no hopes of preferment there. He found his way to Madrid, studied carefully

the court, and determined to make it his Eldorado.

"It was at this time, that the report was spread abroad of the intention of Don Philip to re-marry himself, and of the power given to the Princess of Ursins to choose the future Queen. Alberoni found means of access to the Camerera Mayor. He was bold, insinuating, and ready-witted, and in a short time obtained the mastery of her ear. He suggested to her a wife for the King. She was Elizabeth Farnese, our present sovereign, the niece of the Duke of Parma. She was represented by the wily priest as meek, amiable, unaspiring, without self-will, without ambition. The portrait owed its features entirely to the imagination; but it pleased. The too credulous Camerera Mayor fell into the snare, and the Abbé Alberoni was dispatched to Parma, with power to conclude the marriage. It took place accordingly by proxy, and the new Queen started for her future home. She took her way through France. Her equipages and attendants met her at the frontier, and she continued her route southwards. The marriage was to take place

at Guadalaxara, a town of old Castile, half-way between the Pyrenees and Madrid, and thither Philip repaired to await his bride.

"In the meantime, the Queen had arrived at Xadraca, a small town seven leagues to the north of it. There too went the Princess of Ursins to meet her new sovereign, and in the full court dress of Camerera Mayor; for the King had reappointed her to the office which she had held under the Savoyarde."

The duke paused for a moment as if from exhaustion, and then resumed:

"It was the 23rd of December, 1714. I shall never forget the day. The winter had been an early one, and the country was covered with deep snow. At seven o'clock in the evening, the princess arrived at Xadraca, and was at once introduced to the presence of Elizabeth Farnese. What think you, Don Carlos, was her reception?"

"I know what it should have been," said Clifford. "The Camerera Mayor had given one of the mightiest thrones upon earth to the pauper relative of a pauper prince! and she was entitled to expect in return, favour, wealth, honours, everlasting gratitude!"

"So much for the poetical justice of the drama. Learn the realities of its last act! No sooner had the princess entered, than the Queen addressed her in language of anger and abuse, and on Madame des Ursins approaching for the purpose of humbly remonstrating, Elizabeth Farnese affected to fear personal danger and shrieked for aid. The room was filled immediately with her guards and attendants.

"'Arrest me that woman,' said she to the officers in charge, 'and send her off to the French frontier—instantly—instantly, I say, without a moment's delay.'"

"And what," said Clifford, "did the officer? To one who had been so long in the habit of viewing Madame des Ursins as the paramount authority, the order must have been embarrassing."

"It was so, and Amenzaga, who was in command of the detachment of the royal guard, hesitated."

"Naturally enough," said Clifford, laughing; "but to hesitate was in fact, to refuse; and what did the Queen?"

"She drew from the bosom of her dress a slip of paper and presented it to Amenzaga.

He read it—grew pale as death—bowed to the ground, and then turning to the Princess of Ursins, in a faltering voice told her she was his prisoner. Anne de la Tremouille forgot, perhaps, her dignity, for she declined to obey, but her refusal was unavailing; some troopers of the guard dragged her to her carriage, and within about half an hour after she had first seen the creature of her ill-advised bounty, she was on her way to perpetual exile."

"What a fate!" said Clifford.

"Ah! you know not," broke in Therese, passionately, "you know not half its cruelty. The ground, as my grandfather has informed you, was covered deep with snow. They had provided for her no mantles, no cloaks, no covering of any kind to defend her from its influence. There were no relays of horses—no food prepared—nothing to make the journey less painful. For fourteen long days and nights did she continue her tedious route—with no warmer clothing than her court dress, and scarce any food but some eggs hastily prepared at the miserable hostelries."

"True, my child," said the old noble.

"These were privations, and no small ones; but they were merely physical—and what were they compared with the mental misery which she endured? For twelve years she had been the real sovereign of Spain, her glance obeyed —her words law; and now a captive, a beggar, sent into exile from the country she had ruled, with almost as rude a treatment as would have been exhibited towards its meanest felon!"

"And was it ever discovered," said Clifford, "what was the cause, or who the author of a charge so extraordinary?"

"Need you ask, Don Carlos?" said Therese. "The cause and the author were alike one—Alberoni! He had won the ear of the Camerera Mayor by exaggerating the timidity and the absence of ambition in the princess. He had won the ear of the princess by representing in colours equally extravagant, the overbearing temper and the despotic will of the future mistress of her household. He it was, who had suggested to Elizabeth Farnese the instant dismissal of Anne de la Tremouille, and he, too, had prepared all the accompaniments, even to the most minute, of the tragedy."

"No Machiavel could have planned it better," said the young envoy. "And yet in all great political events success depends as much upon chance as upon forethought. If the officer of the guard had refused to arrest his former mistress, the Camerera Mayor, and not Elizabeth Farnese, might to-day have been ruling in Madrid."

"The danger," said the old noble, "had occurred to Alberoni, and (for I would do no injustice to his talents) been provided against. He had obtained from Philip, at the request of his future bride, an order in the royal handwriting, and with the royal signature, commanding the officer of the guard to obey implicitly in all matters, and upon all points, the commands of his future sovereign."

"And this was the paper which the queen presented to Amenzaga?"

"It was."

"And did the king know of the manner in which his order was to be employed?"

"That," said the old noble, gravely, "is a matter between Philip and his God; but however innocent might have been his intentions,

the result was not the less fatal. The *Yo el Rey* is a talisman which we all obey in Spain, and in this case, as in others, it performed its mission. Don Philip may have written in ignorance the order to his officer, but it did not the less condemn the friend of his youth to perpetual exile."

"What a strange fate!" said the young envoy, "and what a termination to a career of almost unrivalled brilliancy."

"Yes," said the duke. "There are few records in the annals of human revolutions of a fall more sudden or more terrible. Alberoni was successful, but you can guess well the feelings of his victim. The interests of England and France may and must alter with passing events, and their intrigues may seek to prop a ministry to-day and ruin it to-morrow; but the policy of Anne de la Tremouille changes not. Five years have elapsed since the catastrophe; five long and wretched years. A hundred times have they witnessed her plots for the downfall of her betrayer, and a hundred times they have seen their failure. But still she goes on, hoping against hope, and like the spider, reconstructing

the threads of her web as often as they are broken: and eventually she must and will succeed, for the perseverance of a life is ever successful in the end. Are not we ourselves the best witnesses to her power? I am an old man, one of the greatest and wealthiest of Spain's nobles. You are young—a soldier—the representative of a foreign people; and this girl, by our side, is at the age when girls think of nothing but ornament, and dress and pleasure; and yet all three, diverse as are our objects, our interests, our aspirations, are to-day the inmates of a prison—and why? Because we are nothing but puppets in the hand of this wonderful woman."

There was silence for some time. Clifford and Therese seemed busy with their own thoughts, and each, as they in turn contemplated the strange incidents and unexpected combinations which had congregated them in their present abode, could not help admitting the justice of the conclusions of the Grand Chamberlain; but the old noble was in no mood to permit the continuance of the melancholy which was gradually stealing over them.

"Come, Therese," said he, in a cheerful tone, "we must not be down-hearted. I have seen enough of the changes of life to know that Fortune's wheel is ever turning. In one short year I was viceroy of Naples, then captive of the Austrians, and then once more free and powerful as ever, and why should it not be so again? To-day the luck is Alberoni's—it may be ours to-morrow; so let us have done with politics and despair. You were wont to be skilful with your guitar. It is long since I have heard its notes. Give me, then, one of my favourite romaunts. It will recall associations of happier times."

Therese obeyed. The instrument so universal in Spain, was introduced, and with exquisite taste, she sang that most beautiful of old Spanish ballads, whose plaintive character so well suited to the circumstances of the moment, and which probably suggested it to her memory. It was that which begins with the words—

"Fonte frida—Fonte frida—
Fonte frida—Y con amor."

When the melody was ended, Clifford fancied he saw something like exhaustion in the invalid, and rose to retire. Ere he departed the old noble once more shook his hand kindly.

"I shall be glad to see you, Don Carlos," said he, "when you are disposed to expend your leisure in sitting by a sick man's bed. I shall be glad to see you, I say, for you are of my mother's family, and I love all of her name. But I will not always condemn you to so little cheerful an associate. The alcayde, for the sake of past times, has been kind to us, and has given my granddaughter the adjoining chamber for her own use. There she will be happy to receive you in the forenoon, for I am confident I speak but her thoughts when I say you will be welcome. You will have an opportunity, too, of preparing yourself for fresh diplomacy, by practising your Castilian; though, to say the truth, it is unnecesary, for there is not a lounger at the Puerto del Sol who better patters our language. So, once more, good night"

Clifford bowed to his host. He bent still

lower to the beautiful being by his side. The courtesy was replied to by a flushed cheek, and a somewhat agitated inclination of the head, and the young envoy returned to his apartment.

On the following morning he availed himself of the permission given him, and sought Therese in her sitting-room. The meeting of the lovers was one of embarrassment, for the lady was timid and shy. Clifford remarked the feeling, and guessed its cause.

"She is alone," said he to himself: "she is unprotected. I must prove to her that I deserve the favour so generously granted to me by the Grand Chamberlain. Amid the misfortunes of her house it would be an insult to intrude my feelings upon her attention. I will not speak to her of love—I will be to her as a brother."

This resolution was, for the most part, rigorously adhered to. His manner and conversation were those of one who took a deep interest —an affectionate interest—in the fortunes of his companion, and in those of her venerable grandsire, but they were strictly kept within

these limits, and never even hinted at a warmer feeling.

Insensibly Therese remarked the delicacy of his conduct, and caught courage from it. Their conversation, by slow degrees, became more frank and confidential, till at length, the whole of her past life—the hatred of her grandfather to Alberoni—her anxiety to forward his plans, her mission to the Princess of Ursins—her residence in Paris, and the different means proposed for carrying out the plot, down to the selection of himself, were all unreservedly laid open to him. To him, too, were narrated the full details of her interview with Philip—the promise of the king for the liberation of her grandsire—its recall at the suggestion of Alberoni, and the ominous intentions of the Cardinal, communicated to her by La Roche, of bringing the duke to trial, were each enlarged on in their turn.

"And if it were so," said Clifford to his companion, "why should you encourage such gloomy anticipations of the result? The duke is innocent of anything but a wish to displace a prime minister."

"It is true, and no one knows it better than yourself, for you were a witness of the conference from its commencement to its close. Yet it cannot be denied—the duke himself would not deny—that the Count of Lemos proposed treason against the person of the King, and how could a distinction be drawn between the author of such a plot, and the man in whose house that plot first received utterance?"

"You think, then?"—and Clifford hesitated.

Therese observed his embarrassment, and interpreted justly its cause.

"Yes," continued she, in a faint tone, "I think my grandfather's life in danger!"

"And is there no way to save it?"

"But one—the fall of Alberoni before the day of trial; and that, God help me!" continued she, clasping her hands, "seems impossible!"

There was silence for a minute: it was broken by Clifford.

"I do not," said he, "look so despairingly on the future as yourself. You well know that I was sent into this country for the purpose of

overthrowing the Cardinal, and was furnished by those who sent me with what were considered sufficient means. Could I but have obtained an interview with the Queen, I am confident I should have prevailed on her to dismiss the minister."

"Yes, I recollect; and the interview would have been no difficult matter to accomplish, for you were furnished with private letters commanding to that effect the good offices of the Marquis Scotti, ambassador of Parma."

"You allow, then," said Clifford, joyfully, "that the fall of the Cardinal is still not impossible."

"With the powers you possess, it *might* not have been, were you free; but you are a captive, and they are useless."

"And why should I remain a captive?"

Therese looked at him with astonishment, and then added, with a faint smile, "You forget, Don Carlos; you are in a royal prison, and its walls are not like those of houses which children build upon the sand. You cannot sweep them away at will."

"True; but I may at least escape from their bondage, for, in such a cause, I hold nothing impossible. Ah!" continued he, in a confident tone, "if I had but friends without—if I had but the aid and the counsel of that quick-witted rascal, my Gitano guide, I should soon leave my gaolers to look upon an empty cell!"

The young girl started, and for a moment her features expressed strong agitation.

"And would you, Charles?" said she—"would you, for my sake—for my grandfather's sake, I mean, undertake such a risk?"

"Do you doubt it?" said her lover; and for a moment his resolutions were forgotten, and his eloquent glance told the tale which his lips refused to utter.

"But the risk!" said his agitated companion. "Have you calculated the risk? Do you know that if you fail, you will be loaded with chains, and consigned to the walls of a dungeon? Nay, it may be worse—even worse;" and Therese, in horror at the picture which her imagination had called up,

sobbed convulsively, and buried her face in her hands.

Clifford approached her.

"Therese, dear Therese," said he, taking her hand, but with great respect; "weep not, and think not of me! When I first heard of this mission, I knew well the perils attendant upon it, and ere I accepted it, left fear behind. Think not, therefore, of me. Think only of him of whom you ought to think—of your aged grandfather. If any evil were to overtake his grey hairs, how bitter would be your remorse when you recollected, that you might possibly have warded it off, but for your too great delicacy to one who was, but a few weeks ago, a stranger."

Therese shuddered, but she made no effort to withdraw her hand.

"Come, my dear cousin," said her companion, in a firm, yet gentle tone, "nerve yourself, and all may yet be well. You have power over these gipsies—you have probably some means of communicating with them. If so, I pray you, earnestly, to use it. Let me but once have conference with Perez and I am again a free man!"

"And why," said Therese, "if freedom be thus easily procured, have you not obtained it already?"

"Why! Can your own feelings not suggest the answer? Or think you that a prison has aught but charms for me if you are its inmate?"

"Yet you would go now, and go willingly;" and the tone of the fair speaker had in it something of complaint.

"And do you reproach me with that? Yes; I would go now, and willingly. My first object in life is your happiness, and I leave you to secure it; for where would that happiness be if the old man's grey hairs were brought with sorrow to the grave?"

"You are generous, Charles; most generous, and you will excuse the petulance of a wayward girl. I will no longer throw difficulties—God help me! that I should say so—in the way of your enterprise. You will escape, and all may yet be well, for you were right in your surmises. Perez and his tribe are at my service, and a short note, which I received yesterday, communicated to me the residence of one of them in the town. To-morrow I will see the man, and

if the aid of the Zincali be sufficient to secure your flight, rest assured that you will have it zealously rendered. And now, for the present, adieu! I am ill, and need repose."

She bowed timidly as she spoke, yet coldly, for the poor girl began to fear that she had permitted her secret to escape her; and the consciousness of betrayed affection naturally produced reaction, and, the momentary semblance at least of the opposite feeling. Clifford, too, had once more re-entered within the limits of that grave politeness which he had laid down for himself, and which, for the instant, he had momentarily forgotten; and as he retired, he replied to the courtesy of his companion by an obeisance as formal as her own. Strange the approximation of animate and inanimate nature! Many a volcano is covered with snow, and often do the most burning passions of the human heart shroud themselves beneath the veil of chilling indifference.

CHAPTER III.

MANUELA.

THERESE kept her word, and the gipsy scout performed his part well. On the second day after his departure, a large tribe of the swarthy wanderers appeared in Segovia or its neighbourhood. Some of them took up their quarters in the ruinous buildings of the town itself, while the larger portion encamped on a gentle slope on the northern side of the Eresma, and directly opposite the terrace which formed the pleasure-ground of the prisoners. These were, for the most part, housed under their low, dingy tents, but the chief of the tribe established himself in

a dilapidated farm-house standing on a knoll on the edge of the woodland, somewhat in advance of the habitations of his fellows, and at no great distance from the castle. There he set up his portable forge; for, in Spain, Vulcan may be considered the special god of the gipsy tribes, and to their hands have been in a great measure abandoned farriery and the other subdivisions of the trade connected with tin or iron-work. The rest of the male members of the community were not idle. They had brought with them, for sale, horses and mules, some of excellent quality. These were picketed on the low grounds beneath the tents, and occasionally took their exercise on the plain by the side of the river.

The scene was one of great animation. The numerous canvas-covered edifices scattered here and there as chance dictated, now half hidden in the forest, and now breaking in irregular groups from its shade; the gay-coloured flags which streamed from their summits; the swarthy population, with its dirty but still gaudy Oriental, and picturesque-looking drapery; the busy life; the click of the hammers of the tin-

smith; the heavier blow of the blacksmith on the anvil; the horses galloping to and fro, as, with their wild riders on their backs, they were exhibited for sale; the Sybil-like looks of the gipsy women; the wondering crowd, half-terrified and half-fascinated, in its thousand varieties of costume, ever changing their grouping and aspect with the changing movements of the wearers—altogether formed a picture such as is only met with in the lands of the Children of the Sun.

The excitement of the scene seemed to restore cheerfulness to the young heiress of the Grand Chamberlain.

"Look here, Don Carlos," said she to her lover, as, after breakfast, they moved forth from the sitting-room to the terrace. "Look here, and then confess that I am a real fairy. See," said she, pointing to the opposite side of the river, "last night that was nothing but a solitude, and—hey, presto!—I wave but my wand, and behold! a city rises as rapidly as the palace of Aladdin."

"But not so magnificent, Therese," said Clifford, laughing. "One would seek in vain

here for the thousand pillars of marble, or the golden furniture which was the handiwork of the slaves of the Lamp."

"Pshaw! what matters that? I would wager my rosary that my creation is the more picturesque of the two; and what beauty in architecture is equal to picturesqueness? Besides, my spells have only begun to work. Wait till you see the result, and then, most critical Sir, you may doubt my power if you can."

The young lady was at this moment interrupted by her waiting-maids, who came to announce that a gipsy woman had arrived in Segovia, who had the reputation of a prophetess of the most extraordinary powers. According to the account of the excited damsels, the things which she foretold were more wonderful and more delightful than ever had been prophesied before. She was not only, like common seers, able to announce whether a girl should be married or not, but she could describe the features, the person, the dress, nay, it was whispered, even the very name of the future spouse. Such, at least, had been the

information communicated to them by the servants of the governor, and they now entreated their lady to use her influence with Don Juan, and obtain permission for the prophetess to be introduced.

Therese looked at Clifford and smiled.

"The spell," whispered she, "is working. Well, girls," continued the young lady, turning to her attendants, "the curiosity is an idle one, nevertheless, it is natural, and I will not thwart it. Nay, I will even confess that I share it myself. When the witch has told you your fortunes, send her hither. I would fain learn mine."

Agreeably to the wishes of Donna Therese, the governor gave the necessary orders, the gipsy was admitted, and shortly after was introduced to the chamber of the young heiress. Clifford had left it.

"You would embarrass her," Therese had said to her lover. "When we meet, we must meet alone."

The woman who entered might have been about thirty, but sorrow had written its lines deep upon her cheek, and she looked ten years

older. She was dressed in the common costume of her tribe—a crimson kirtle, or short petticoat, connected above with a bodice of black velvet, vandyked at the edges, and coming four inches below the waist. Her neck was bare, save where it was protected by a large handkerchief tied loosely round it, while another of crimson silk was fastened under the chin, and covered her head. The dress was very short, and displayed a gracefully-formed foot and ankle, clothed in light blue stockings and a low, silver-buckled shoe. She carried a basket in her hand, full of ribands and laces, and other articles necessary to female adornment.

So long as the servant who introduced her was in the room, she stood motionless by the door; but no sooner was it closed than she dropped her basket, and advancing hastily to Therese, fell upon her knees, and kissed frequently and with passionate earnestness the young girl's hand, pressing it at intervals against her forehead and heart.

"I see you once more, Señorita," said she, in a low, soft voice. "My eyes are

blessed by being permitted to look on you again."

"And you, my poor Manuela," said the girl, "how does it fare with you? It is but two years since we met, and ah! Manuela," continued she, shaking her head as if in remonstrance, "the hand, not of time, but of sorrow has been heavy on you. Why should you thus ever mourn? For you, life may have still many happy years."

"For me, lady," said the gipsy, "life is over. For me, there is neither joy in its joy nor sorrow in its sorrow; I breathe with scarce the consciousness of existence, I move with scarce the knowledge of the motion."

"And why should it be so? Why should there not come peace over your heart? Why do you not seek aid of Holy Church?"

"Lady, I wish not to offend, but my faith is not as yours. To the women of my race, there is but one principle and one virtue — their chastity. So long as that remains to them, they live. When they have it not, they die."

"Say not so," said the young girl. "Great

as your trials have been, the blessed Virgin might relieve them."

"Never! There is but one relief for them, and that is the grave."

"And yet prayer—"

"Lady, I pray not. Why should I pray? If there be indeed a Great Spirit above the sky, he can justly claim worship only where he confers benefits; and what have I and my race received at his hands but evil?"

"Alas! alas!" said Therese, wringing her hands. "What a fearful state of mind is this!"

"Nay, I meant not to grieve you; but if you would listen to your servant, let us not talk of these things. Between my belief and the stories that your priests tell you, there is a gulf which neither you nor I can pass. I pray you, then, speak not of them, but say in what can I pleasure you. You have sent for me, and I and my tribe exist but to obey you."

Therese appeared embarrassed, and over her cheek the colour went and came, changeful as an April hour.

The clear eye of the gipsy remarked the thoughts as they chased each other over the ingenuous countenance before her, and read them well. To one so practised in discovering the secrets of human nature, the text was not difficult.

"They told me, lady," said she, "that you wished to have your fortune told, but I believed it not. You can read the future as well as I; for you know that our future is precisely that which we build for ourselves. Again I ask, therefore, why have you sent for me?"

Once more Therese coloured and hesitated.

"Then, lady," said the gipsy, "I must tell what you will not speak. The stranger who was your companion on the road, and whom we took captive to the Moorish tower, is young, is brave, is beautiful, and you love him."

Again Therese blushed deeply.

"He is a prisoner here," continued the gipsy, "and you would set him free. Is it not so?"

Once more the cheek of the young heiress flushed; but the lips said nothing.

"It is so, and it should be so. He saved you from death, and worse than death," said Manuela, and she shivered as she spoke, "and you would be a traitress and ungrateful, unless you saved him. Again, lady, I ask, have I not spoken the truth?"

Therese looked timidly at her companion, and nodded.

"Well if it is so, the matter cannot be difficult; for you have gold, and we have cunning."

"Would you effect his escape," said Therese, "as you secured his entrance at the city gate? —would you once more stain him black, and give him the dress and the appearance of the Zincali?"

Manuela shook her head.

"It might be suspected," said she; "we must devise another plan." She paused for a minute, and then added: "He must go down the rock."

"It is a fearful risk, Manuela," said the young heiress, as she paled at the thought.

"It will need a stout heart," replied the gipsy; "but the eyes that blenched not at the

pass of the Bocca Chica need not fear to look upon the rock of the Alcazar of Segovia."

"And how would you effect it? By a ladder of rope?"

Manuela was again silent, as if in thought.

"It will not do," said she at length. "The ladder, unless it were of silk, would be too heavy. We could not introduce it without suspicion into the fortress. But now that I understand your wishes, I will go and consult with Perez. He has a better head than myself, and can no doubt devise the means. By to-morrow morning I will return."

And the gipsy retired.

Therese communicated to Clifford the result of the interview, and they agreed to leave the whole matter in the hands of the Gitano. Indeed, there was little choice, as only those on the outside could form an accurate judgment of the difficulties, or the mode in which they were to be overcome. From the terrace, no doubt, might be had a general view of the precipice below; but its descent was occasionally broken by masses of rock which threw themselves forward, and intercepted the eye.

What perils existed beneath the projecting crags remained unknown, and yet upon that knowledge depended the flight and its success. To a spectator on the outside, on the contrary, the whole exterior surface of the cliff was distinctly discernible, and with the obstacles thus brought face to face, there existed, to a certain extent, the means of overcoming them. To Perez, therefore, and his ingenuity, they agreed to trust for the development of the plan and its details.

Their zealous agent seemed to lose no time in commencing his new duties. The two lovers, as might naturally have been expected, passed the forenoon in anxious observation on the terrace; and they remarked that a slight change had taken place in the arrangements of the swarthy-coloured population opposite. In the morning, the horses and mules had been brought down to the river in a drove, or conducted by a dozen different hands; they now, as the mid-day sun became powerful, came again to water, but only one at a time; and the quick eye of Clifford remarked that the successive animals were always ridden by the

same man; and a little further observation satisfied him that that man was Perez. As the beast drank at the stream, he observed too, that the rider, instead of busying himself about the doings of his quadruped, sat lazily on his back, gazing with a sleepy, half-stupid look at the precipice which arose from the opposite bank. The manœuvre, for the animals were numerous, was again and again repeated, and still the same dreamy, indifferent eye glanced over the fortress and its rocky base. At length the man was apparently satisfied; for once more the animals came down in numbers, and under the charge of several hands.

On the following morning, Manuela was again admitted, and without difficulty, to the apartment of the young heiress. In Spain, love and superstition are universal; and as full nine-tenths of the fairer portion of the population ever have been in the habit of consulting sorceresses of the gipsy tribe upon affairs of the heart, no importance was attached to what was considered the very natural curiosity of Donna Teresa.

No sooner was Manuela alone with the young heiress, than she informed her that Perez had been successful, but she added that everything would depend upon the young caballero understanding thoroughly his instructions, as the smallest error in carrying them out would necessarily be fatal. She expressed, therefore, a wish to see him herself. In this too there was no difficulty. Men in the early part of the eighteenth century indulged their curiosity in endeavouring to pry into the future as well as women. Even in educated England, Sir Roger de Coverley is represented in the "Spectator" as listening to the prophecies of a dark-eyed sybil in the gipsy garb; and in Spain the fashion universal amongst the fair sex was by no means uncommon in their usually less credulous brethren.

As soon, therefore, as Therese had ascertained from Manuela the general outline of the plan to be adopted, she summoned one of the servants, and informing him that the fortune-teller had a wish to try her power over the stranger caballero, ordered him to conduct her to Clifford's apart-

ment. Thither Manuela accordingly made her way; and as soon as they were alone, communicated to the young soldier the observations of Perez.

They were little satisfactory. The Gitano had indeed come to the conclusion that the descent was possible; but he did not the less express his opinion that it was to the last degree hazardous, and might not improbably be attended with the loss of life. But Clifford was obstinate. He had made up his mind to the venture; and he anxiously noted down the precautions which Perez had suggested in the event of its being undertaken. When these had been thoroughly mastered, he announced himself ready for the enterprise. A week, however, seemed likely to elapse before any attempt would be made at escape, as it had been decided to conceal the plans in contemplation, not only from the Alcayde, but from the Grand Chamberlain; and certain preparatory arrangements were necessary. These, however, were more rapid in their progress than had been anticipated. On the evening of the fifth day it was already possible to calculate the

period of their completion; and with a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye, Therese told Clifford to hold himself ready for the 22nd.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BETROTHAL.

The eventful day had arrived at last. It was the 22nd day of November, and eight o'clock in the evening. In the suite of apartments appropriated to the Duke of Escalona, and which formed a portion of those formerly occupied by royalty, was one, which, in its appearance and furnishings, offered probably little change from the aspect which it had presented in the days of King Alonzo. It was a room of considerable size, whose unplastered walls were clothed with tapestry of great age, representing the loves of Don Pedro the Cruel and Maria de Padilla. In one portion of the

hangings the frail dame was represented seated like a queen in the midst of her ladies, whilst the king himself placed a chaplet of flowers upon her head. In another she was on horseback, in a forest, while her lover, who stood by the side of her steed, offered to her admiration a goshawk which he held upon his fist. In a third, she appeared as Minerva, clothed in mail, while Don Pedro, also fully armed, presented her with a sword. The figures were ill done: at least, if any reliance was to be placed on the truthfulness of the representation of the artist, there was nothing in the countenance of the fair enslaver of royalty, which could have led a spectator to believe, that she could have broken a queen's heart, and ruined a kingdom. Time, too, had perhaps lent its aid; for the hangings had borrowed additional disfigurement from damp and the lapse of years. The rest of the furniture consisted of some clumsy carved cabinets of oak, and chairs of the same material, bearing evidence of their antiquity in their straight legs, pointed backs, and formal outlines.

The apartment would have been to the last

degree dreary in its character, but for an immense fire-place amply supplied with timber; and beside the cheerful blaze which burst from its deep recesses sat a young man and a dark-eyed girl.

They were Clifford and Therese. For some days past, the duke had been sufficiently well to leave his bed-room during the forenoon; but he always retired with daylight, and the two cousins were left to spend the evenings alone. For though Clifford, from respect to the old man's prejudices, and to those of the country, always ascended to his own apartment prior to the retirement of the Grand Chamberlain, yet since the intimacy that had almost, in spite of themselves, sprung up between himself and Therese, he generally contrived to find his way back to the sitting-room; and there did the two relatives spend the long evenings till the hour of ten and the approach of his gaoler warned the captive once more to return to his solitary prison.

And now he was enjoying her society perhaps for the last time. In a few hours, he was about to engage in an enterprise that might

cost him his life; and the consciousness of that and of his approaching departure, threw a gloom over the spirits of the two occupants of the room. What also contributed to their embarrassment was the formal bearing which, for some days past, they had adopted towards each other. In Clifford, it had sprung from an anxiety not to take advantage of his fair cousin's enforced neighbourhood by pressing attentions, which his pride or his fears suggested to him were unwelcome. In Therese, the reasons were more obvious. To say the truth, she had become insensibly attached to her new-found relative. The beauty of his person might have had something to do with the feeling, for where upon earth is the prude who is not at her heart's core a very woman? But this was not the sole, nor was it even the main attraction. For a woman to love—really to love—she must love one who is superior to herself. Where it is otherwise, there is ever, more or less, the consciousness of patronage, and patronage is inconsistent with respect.

And no one felt this more than the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain. She had in-

herited, with the energy of her father's family, the cultivated mind and talents of her mother's; and it was the union of the powerful will and the powerful intellect which had preserved her heart unscathed in the gay circles of the Court of France, where so much existed which would have been attractive to a feebler spirit. In Clifford, for the first time, she found united, qualities calculated at once to create her admiration and respect; and she loved him the more easily, because in these, so necessary for securing her affections, he was without a rival.

But while she thus yielded to a sentiment she was unable to resist, she was not the less conscious of its danger and its hopelessness; and it was from the conjoint influence of these two feelings—the love and the dread of loving—that originated her present conduct. Maidenly pride induced her to do her best to conceal her favourable sentiments from their object, while a no less honourable feeling rendered her equally anxious to avoid exciting hopes which were not likely to be realized.

Both then were cold, at least in manner;

both were embarrassed, and both silent, for the crisis of the approaching separation had suggested to each that words were alike dangerous to utter or to listen to.

A quarter of an hour might have elapsed, and still each sat gazing at the fire, as if, in the fitful flashes of its flame, they could read the story of their future destiny. But the long-continued silence became, at length, more painful even than language. It was so at least to Therese, and in a tone that affected a gaiety the speaker did not feel, she said:

"Well, Charles, the eventful night has come at last."

There was no answer.

"You do not speak," continued she. "And yet I should have thought that the prospect of escaping from captivity might have given you a more cheerful aspect!"

Again there was no reply.

"What, señor contrabandista," said Therese, with a smile, "will you persist in concealing your thoughts as you concealed your wares? Is not the bird, I ask, glad to escape from its cage?"

"Not," said Clifford, in a low tone, "if it leave its mate behind it."

Therese coloured.

"The representatives," said she, "of high and mighty princes have nothing to do with kith or kindred. Their heart is, or should be, wrapped up in the success of their diplomacy."

"Mine was finished on the night I was arrested. I have already done my best to fulfil the instructions of my superiors, and, as far as my public duties are concerned, am entitled to await the future in honourable captivity."

"And yet to-night you go down the rock!"

"I do; but not for diplomacy."

"I know it. I did but jest. It is to save the life of my poor grandfather."

"You are wrong again, Therese. The duke is my relative, and I would gladly set him free; but I risk life and limb to-night, not for him, but for you."

The young girl was silent for a while, as if from embarrassment.

"It matters little," at length continued she.

"We are both grateful! Oh, how can we repay you?"

"I ask it of neither," replied Clifford. "I have no right to ask it of the duke, for what I do, I do not for his sake: nor do I ask it of you, for I have seen enough to know that I should expect in vain a return."

"It is ungenerous to say so!"

"It is just. I cannot risk life more at the rock of the Alcazar of Segovia than I did at the Bocca Chica; and how was I repaid? You left me without bidding me adieu."

"Unkind! You know it was to save you from the hands of the Cardinal!"

"I know it was to deprive me of that which I valued more than the absence of his bonds!"

"Do you hold liberty so cheap then?"

"No; but I hold the thanks of Donna Teresa Pacheco at a higher value."

"Such would not be the common mode of judging!"

"Such, at least, is mine; and if you would content a human being, you must give him what he thinks happiness, and not what is deemed happiness by others."

Therese was agitated.

"You are angry with me, Charles?" said she. "You think that I am ungrateful!"

"I am not angry—I have no right to be angry; for, I will do you that justice, you have never, in language or manner, led me to hope!"

"But you think me ungrateful?"

"Again I answer I do not say so. I am not entitled to estimate the price at which a young lady holds her happiness or her honour. There are some who would deem that he who had preserved both had but little claim on their affections, unless, in addition to his other excellences, he possessed also wealth, and rank, and power."

"Charles!" said the young girl, in a tone of reproach.

"Therese!" was the reply, but it was uttered coldly.

"I cannot," said she, "bear the unkindness of your accent or your words! You know the prejudices of my grandfather!"

"I know nothing of the feelings of the duke, nor do I ask; but it is here as at Buitrago. There I ventured to inquire if Donna

Teresa Pacheco felt grateful for the services I had rendered her; and there, as here, she replied by informing me of the sentiments of the Duke of Escalona."

Tears streamed down Therese's cheeks.

"You are cruel, Charles," said she, in an agitated tone, "and you reproach me. Yet how unjust the taunt! To what end to tell of my sentiments, if, whether favourable or not, they must depend upon my grandsire's?"

"And why?—wherefore should they so depend? I am willing to make every allowance for the claims of parentage, or the respect that a child should owe to a parent, yet, pushed beyond certain limits, that respect becomes a slavery and not a duty. The Grand Chamberlain has wealth. It is his—his inalienable property, and let him do with it what he will. I seek it not of him—I seek but this fair hand," continued he, as he dropped on his knee beside her, and pressed passionately to his lips the unresisting fingers. "This is your property—yours only; and I ask of you to give it to me, who have bestowed all upon you."

Therese made no effort to withdraw the hand, but the tears streamed down her cheeks.

"And would you," said she, after a while, "have me bestow it without the sanction of my parent? You would make me your wife! How could you love—how could you respect me, if I were to be persuaded, even by you, to forget that, which, you yourself must acknowledge, is the first of duties?"

"I hold it not as such. If you love me, if you really love me, your future happiness must depend upon the gratification of my affection; and what right has the duke, if we ask nothing at his hand, to oppose it? My age, my rank, my future prospects, are all such as will do no dishonour to his grandchild. In wealth alone I am your inferior; and if you love me better than the wealth, you will not allow our happiness to be marred by its absence."

Therese made no answer.

"Do you love me, Therese? Will you not say you love me?" continued he, pressing passionately his lips to the fair fingers.

The tears came fast, but still there was no reply.

Suddenly, the young soldier sprung to his feet, and his cheek crimsoned with passion.

"I have erred," said he, in a bitter tone. "I have indulged in an idle dream. I have fancied that women could be grateful; but I beg of Donna Teresa Pacheco a thousand pardons for my folly. She has taught me a lesson to the contrary, and I will show my appreciation of it by no longer intruding upon her presence!"

And he turned and moved towards the door.

The poor girl sat for a moment as if stupefied and unconscious of his approaching departure; and then, as the thought flashed upon her, she started to her feet, and with trembling steps hurried after him.

"Charles!" said she, in a low tone, as she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Well!" was the coldly intonated reply.

"You leave me, and in anger?"

Clifford still retained his expression of freezing silence.

"Answer me," said she, in agitated accents; "I beseech you answer me?"

"First answer me," said Clifford. "I asked you a question. Therese, I love you better than fame, better than existence; I love you as devotedly as man ever loved woman, and I have asked you the question, 'Can you love me in return?'"

He looked at her gravely, almost sternly. The poor girl gazed at him with glistening eyes, and made a feeble attempt to speak, but the lips refused utterance; and staggering forwards, she flung her arms about his neck; and her head sunk upon his shoulder. He pressed her to his breast, and again in a low voice whispered in her ear.

"Therese, do you love me?"

"Need you ask?" said she, sobbing. "If I loved you not, would I suffer your arms to encircle my waist? Would I be where I am now? Yes, Charles, I do love you; love you fondly—devotedly."

Again the arms tightened in their embrace; and for a minute nothing could be heard but the throbbing of the kindred hearts.

"And now, love," said he, as he placed her once more in her chair, and sunk on his knees beside her, "I can with light heart defy the rock, and the Cardinal, and all evils for the future. But why," continued he, in a tone of gentle reproach, "why protract my misery so long? why, if you loved me, have concealed it so carefully?"

"Do I act wisely," replied Therese, "in making the avowal now? I fear the prejudices of my grandfather. Were you to insist upon marrying me, in despite of his wishes, you would break my heart; I could never hear a parent's curse and live."

"Fear it not, love; you have been generous to me, I will not be less so to you. Should the duke refuse his consent, I will not, while he lives, enforce your pledge. But in the course of years he must shortly be gathered to his fathers, and I will not permit his parental rights to be carried beyond the grave. If then we must wait, we will wait patiently. And I," continued he, in a gayer tone, "will in the interim strain every nerve to make the future husband of Donna Teresa Pacheco worthy of her love.

But here," said he, as the sound of drawn bolts came upon his ear, "come my gaolers, and I must to my crib. So farewell, my dear girl; we will meet in happier times. Remember me in your prayers, and God bless you!"

He passed his arms around her, their lips met in one long mute embrace, and in another minute Clifford was gone.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROCK OF THE ALCAZAR.

The young soldier had re-ascended to his chamber. His spirits in spite of himself were depressed, and even the recollections of the past hour did not tend to raise them. How fickle are human beings, how changeable, and how various in their objects! If any one had told Clifford fourteen days before that ere long he would be the accepted lover of Mademoiselle de Chalais, and the welcome guest of her father, he would have proclaimed himself the happiest of men. And yet now that both these events so intensely desired had come to pass, his new good fortune, instead of making his

felicity complete, only brought with it new anxieties.

Till he had known Therese he had welcomed danger, for he loved its excitement; but now that he knew her, that he loved her, and had won her love in return, he almost turned back as a coward from perils which were likely to dash the cup of happiness from his lips, and threatened his existence at the very moment when he first felt existence valuable.

For an hour, therefore, after he had gained his room, he sat upon his bed moody and despondent; and it was only when eleven chimed from the churches in the town below, that he was recalled to a sense of the duties which he had to perform, and to the recollection that if he did wish for success in love and ambition, the best mode of assuring its advent was by deserving it. He accordingly extinguished the light, and flinging himself upon the bed awaited anxiously the expected signal.

How slowly the minutes passed, and how impatiently he watched their progress! At length came the appointed hour. The hammers of the great clock of the cathedral pealed

midnight, and Clifford at once sprung to his feet. With a trembling hand he undid the latch of the window and opened it. At that moment, as he was about to descend, he heard the measured tread of armed men. "They are about to change the watch," said he, to himself, "I will wait till it be passed." Apparently he was right, for shortly after came upon the ear the challenge of the sentinel. Then once more was heard the tread of the patrol, and then all was silent. Again Clifford approached the window. He moved out, lowered himself till his full height was suspended by his hands, and then dropped on to the terrace.

He now for the first time ventured to breathe freely, and looked around him. The night was dark, and the wind which had risen towards sun-down, added to its gloom, for the clouds which it swept before it covered the face of the young moon, and made still more feeble her feeble beams. In the windows of the old castle not a light was stirring, and a high wall at either extremity threw the two ends of the terrace also into shade. On the opposite side

of the Eresma, there seemed scarce more sign of life. The camp of the gipsies was dark and silent; one solitary lamp only shone from the windows of the dilapidated farm-house, and gave intimation that its tenants, at least, were watchful.

"All goes well yet," said Clifford to himself. "That light shows Perez is at his post. I must now to mine."

With these words he proceeded to address himself to his desperate enterprise.

It has already been mentioned that the two rivers, the Eresma and the El Clamores skirted the castle to the north and south, and joined their waters at its north-west angle. From either stream, near the point of junction, the rock rose perpendicularly to the height of several hundred feet. But as the rivers receded from each other, the tongue of land between them became broader, and its sides less precipitous; the upper part of the descent only being composed of crag, while below the rock was occasionally broken into shelves or steep banks, covered with turf. Such was the case at the extreme end of the terrace, which abutted upon the great court

in front of the donjon tower, and from which the castle entered. There the cliff sunk from the edge of the parapet to a depth only of seventy or eighty feet, where its downward course was arrested by a projecting ledge. This was about twelve feet square, and towards its outer edge, grew a small stunted oak, which had forced its roots into the crevices of the rock, and drew a scanty nourishment from the ungrateful soil. Below, the ground again sunk perpendicularly, but only to the depth of about thirty feet, while beneath, the descent, though still steep, sloped away to the river, in banks covered with turf and low brushwood.

It was at this point, where the ledge projected from the cliff, and broke it into two unequal parts, that Perez had determined should take place the escape of Clifford. The descent of the upper precipice was to be accomplished by means of a silk ladder; while for the lower, little elevated as it was, a single rope was held sufficient, and this, it was proposed, should be raised from below by a slender line, to be wound round the waist till its services were needed. In furtherance of this scheme, Manuela,

who paid daily visits to the castle, under pretence of selling female finery, had at intervals introduced a quantity of silk cords. These Therese had put together during the night, and afterwards concealed the connected fragment in one of the old wardrobes which decorated her apartment, and from this, in the early part of the evening, the incidents of which we have recorded in the last chapter, they had been removed by Clifford, who deposited them in a stone pavilion, or summer-house, which terminated one end of the terrace.

Such had been the preparations made for the drama of the night. We must now return to him who was to play the principal part in it. The young soldier, as it may be recollected, had safely gained the terrace, and had lingered for a moment to ascertain the repose of the inmates of the castle, and the watchfulness of his gipsy comrade. All was of good augury, and with stealthy steps he made his way to the pavilion. From this he removed the precious coil, dragged it to the foot of the parapet wall, and passed the loop which formed the upper end of the ladder, over one of the vases which projected

from the stone-work. This done, he allowed the silken net to drop gently over the face of the cliff.

All was now ready, but still he moved not, and for the first time appeared to hesitate; for he gazed wistfully over the precipice, as if he would have traced his future path amidst its darkness. It was in vain. His eye could read nothing in the gloomy depths below, and in spite of himself he shivered.

The weakness, however, was but momentary.

"Pshaw!" said he, "it is my profession to face death, and how could I meet it in a nobler cause?"

With the words he put his foot upon the ladder; but he instantly withdrew it, and with a throbbing heart, for at that moment, the wind swept along the face of the rock, and as the light silken cord was caught in its eddies, it was whirled like chaff before it. But the gust passed as rapidly as it came, and Clifford once more put his foot upon the step.

The weight seemed to steady the slender cords, and for it might be twenty feet the young soldier descended in safety, but his danger in-

creased as he approached the platform. There the cliff receded, and the wind as it swept along its concave surface, whirled round and round the ladder. Clifford's head swam, his eyes closed, and for a moment he felt that he was lost, but the blast swept by, and the ladder was once more steady. As soon as he had recovered himself, he hurriedly continued the descent, till, at length, his foot felt the welcome pressure of rock beneath.

He believed that he had reached the projecting ledge, but it was still too dark to enable him to ascertain the fact by eyesight; he had nothing, for it, therefore, but to cling to the ladder and with one foot on its step to explore the ground near him. It was fortunate he had taken this precaution, for though the foot which, like the dove from the ark, had been sent forth on a voyage of discovery, rested at first upon firm ground, it immediately after, on his advancing it a little, went over the edge of the precipice, and the jerk was so sudden from the weight of his body, that he had nearly followed it.

"I understand it now," said he, as he once more recovered himself, and had his two feet

firmly planted on the silken step. "I understand it now. The wind has carried the ladder to the verge of the ledge; I must try the other side."

He did so, and with better success. For there the horizontal mass extended itself beyond the exploring toe, and there, after sundry experiments the young soldier deposited himself in safety.

For some time he lay motionless, for his head and nerves had to a certain degree lost their firmness, and he felt giddy; but the chill air of a November night soon revived him, and made him conscious of his position, and the necessity for further action.

It was not easy. The ledge was not above twelve feet square, and upon three sides it dropped perpendicularly towards the river. On one only, that at which Perez awaited him, was the descent sufficiently small to be covered by his rope. Fortunately for his perplexities, the heavens cleared for a minute, and the young soldier had a distinct view of his locality, and a just idea of the danger of his enterprise.

His first glance was to the ladder, or rather

to the place which he knew it occupied, for with one foot he still touched its cords. It had been as he expected. The wind had carried the light and slender ropes off their perpendicular line, to the very edge of the cliff. Had they diverged two feet more, Clifford must have been lost. Fervently did he thank Heaven for his safety, and once more proceeded to reconnoitre his ground. On the right, a few feet off, was the old oak-tree. To this, as his most important object, he first crawled, and was able at a glance, to guess what portion of its root would bear his weight. It was fortunate that he had lost no time in making the scrutiny, for immediately after, dark vapours again swept across the sky, and everything was once more as black as midnight. He had ascertained, however, the comparative safety of his position, and he ventured to sit up, and to unwind the cord which was passed round his waist. This done, he fastened one end of it to the tree, and awaited impatiently the signal.

A quarter of an hour might have elapsed, though to Clifford, occupied as he was from moment to moment in perpetual watchful-

ness, the time appeared much longer, when a low cry as of an owl came upon his ear. He replied to it by flinging his cord over the cliff, keeping his hand carefully on the upper part, in order to ascertain if any one grasped it below. One minute passed—two—three—five—and yet there was nothing to intimate to him that it had arrived at its intended destination. "They cannot find the small line in the dark," said he to himself, "or have I thrown it over the wrong face of the cliff?—but, ha! yes; there is a jerk, sure enough."

In fact, at that instant, a sudden pull from beneath intimated to him that the lower end of the cord was in friendly hands. For two minutes the line remained motionless, and then another jerk gave him a fresh signal It was understood; and Clifford once more re-coiled his line, bringing along with it the heavier rope, which was intended for his own descent, and this in its turn was fastened round the tree.

This portion of the undertaking had been the subject of his least forethought, and yet it was the most dangerous. Like most landsmen, he had been little accustomed to hold on by his

arms, and he had great difficulty in supporting his weight, notwithstanding the aid given to his knees by knots made for that purpose on the rope. Besides which, the wind had increased to a gale, and as it drove the cord and its burden backwards and forwards along the face of the cliff, his hands became lacerated, and the streaming blood added fresh difficulty to his giving firmness to his grasp. At length, as his head and bodily power were alike failing him, he felt the touch of fingers on his foot, and in another minute was in the arms of his guide.

"Bravo, señor," said the Gitano, "I am thankful to see you safe, and yet I little expected it, for since the wind rose, it would require a bold cragsman to come down the face of that rock, even by daylight. But what is this?" continued he, as his companion sank to the ground. "It is a mere swoon; and this is the best cure for it."

As he spoke, he produced from his pocket a flask of brandy, and applied it to Clifford's lips. The effect of the liquor was to a certain degree restorative, and yet so thoroughly stupefied was

the young soldier, that he was unable to walk without aid, and the gipsy half-supporting, half-leading him, made his way towards the foot of the hill.

The ground, though no longer rocky, was still steep and broken, and not unfrequently, Clifford and his guide lost their footing. Still, however, they proceeded in their descent, and had nearly reached the bottom, when Perez, who, in his anxiety to assist his companion, had forgotten the proper attention to his own security, slipped, and fell at full length. His gun chanced to be slung at his back, and as he rolled on the ground, a branch of brushwood caught the trigger, and the piece went off. Fortunately, neither himself nor his companion were injured, but the report at once attracted the attention of the sentry overhead, and whether from suspicion of what had happened, or for the purpose of giving the alarm, he fired off his musket, apparently aiming at the spot from whence the sound proceeded, for a ball whistled through the branches, and flattened itself against an adjoining rock.

"That's not a bad shot, señor," said Perez,

laughing. "But come, make haste, for we shall have the whole of the castle astir in five minutes, and if we do not be off immediately, we are lost men."

Clifford muttered something about his inability to move, and faintly told Perez to leave him, and make his escape alone.

"No, no," said the Gitano, "that would never do. What would the señorita say? I should never dare to face her again. Come; we are not ten yards from the foot of the hill."

As he spoke, he continued his way, dragging rather than leading after him his exhausted companion. A few steps fortunately brought them to the bottom of the bank, and they found themselves in a narrow strip of open meadow bounded by the Eresma. Towards this the Gitano hurried his companion, and with him plunged into the water. Fortunately, it was not much more than knee-deep; though the strength of the current, and the sliminess of the stones which formed its bed, made their progress difficult and slow.

At length they reached the opposite bank, and both turned involuntarily to look at the

fortress, now for the first time visible. It was evidently in a state of great excitement, for loud cries were heard, and lights hurriedly appeared and disappeared at its numerous windows. Almost at the same moment, a bright flash was seen from one of the embrasures of the outer wall, followed by a loud report.

"Ay," said Perez, "there goes the cannon announcing the escape of a prisoner, but it is too late. It is difficult to lay finger upon the Zincalo when he has the sky overhead and the turf under foot."

He whistled as he spoke. The signal was immediately replied to in a similar fashion, and a man rode up, leading a mule on either side of him.

"Come, señor," said the Gitano, "here is your old friend the Duchessa. She has done you good service before now, and must again. So put foot in the stirrup and mount."

Clifford was unable to make the required exertion; but Perez and his companion succeeded in lifting him to the saddle, placing him between them so as to be able to support him in case of increasing weakness; and the

whole party moved off at speed in the direction of the Somo Sierra. Rapidly did the fortress and its lights disappear behind them. But still, and for many a long mile, there came upon the car, though fainter and more faint, the distant sound of the heavy gun, as from the prison rock it heralded to the surrounding country that a captive had escaped from its walls.

CHAPTER VI.

JOSÉ.

THERESE was once more in Madrid. Three days had elapsed since Clifford's escape. It is needless to say with what anxiety she had watched its progress. As soon as her lover had left her, she retired to her bedroom, but not to sleep; there was too much dependant upon the chances of the few succeeding hours to make rest possible. To evade suspicion, however, she extinguished her lamp; she then withdrew the window-curtains, and gazing through its closed casements, endeavoured to peer into the darkness. There was nothing visible save the solitary light in the gipsy

camp. Yet to Therese, no star in the firmament would have been half so welcome, for to her, as to her lover, it announced that Perez was on the alert, and that the arrangements for the flight were already in progress.

When the hour of midnight pealed from the cathedral, her anxieties became redoubled, and to support herself, she was fain to lean against the window-frame. Shortly after, a dark shadow passed before the glass, and then for half an hour all was silent. How slowly its minutes passed. In that half-hour, to the young girl, was comprised an eternity. All at once her dream was broken by the report of a musket. Then followed hurried cries, then the bolts of the outer hall were drawn, and lights flashed under her door, and steps were heard ascending to Clifford's room. What was the misery of that moment! Had they seized him, and once more led him back to captivity? Worse still, perhaps; he might be wounded—murdered!

But there was little time for speculation. In another instant the steps were heard descending the stairs, and then came shouts, and oaths, and curses; and then the whole building shook,

as the heavy cannon spoke in thunder from the battlements. It was the signal of the prisoner's escape. Was he after all really free? The question had scarcely been propounded to her own heart, when it was answered. From the ruined building on the hill-side opposite, shone forth at once three lights. They blazed fiercely for an instant, and then died away. It was the agreed upon signal of success, and Therese sank upon her knees, and thanked Heaven for the great deliverance.

On the following morning, it is easy to understand the excitement which prevailed in the castle. The first act of the governor was to dispatch at daybreak a courier to the Cardinal, to acquaint him with the escape of his prisoner. The next was to send out a small body of horse to scour the country and neighbourhood, and more especially to bring before him some of the leading gipsies, whom Don Juan Sanchez shrewdly suspected of being concerned in the occurrences of the past night. The expedition was in every way unfortunate. No traces could be found of the English Envoy; nor even, strange to say, of the Gitanos. The sun had set upon a canvas city. Its first rays rose upon

a solitary forest, where the only traces of former inhabitants were to be found in the charred wood and cinders, which had marked the site of their fires.

Baffled in his first efforts, the alcayde next directed his investigation to those within his own walls. But this scrutiny was not more successful than the other. The Duke of Escalona stated, with his usual frankness, that he had not only lent no aid to the prisoner's flight, but had not even known that any idea of escape was contemplated; and the old noble was believed at once, for his word was known to be as good as his bond. A stricter investigation was then set on foot amongst the domestics, but that, too, was fruitless, for they had never been trusted, and knew nothing. As for Donna Teresa, her youth and her high rank placed her, if not beyond the pale of suspicion, at least beyond that of questioning. The old soldier in command of the fortress at any rate said nothing, but the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain speedily came to the conclusion that, in his private thoughts, Don Juan Sanchez believed her to be a participator in the preparations for the flight; for his manner, once

so courteous, had become cold, distant, almost uncivil.

It mattered little, the great event had been accomplished, and Therese felt that her presence was required elsewhere. Without, therefore, mentioning to her grandfather any particulars of the plans to be adopted, she suggested that her time might be employed at Madrid more beneficially for his interest than at Segovia. The duke assented. His health was so much improved, that the attentions of his grandchild were no longer necessary; and he was the more willing to give his sanction to her departure, as he too had remarked the change in the manners of the alcayde, and though he said nothing, perchance guessed at the grounds for it.

Therese, therefore, had once more taken up her residence in her father's house at Madrid. She found there, as usual, Donna Violante; but she was no longer a welcome guest. Her ward could not help suspecting that the duenna had something to do with the calamity of the banqueting-room, and treated her old friend with extreme coldness. Donna Violante's conscience probably suggested to her the cause of

so sudden a change from familiarity to dislike, for she asked no explanations, and took refuge in her own apartment.

The sudden alienation, painful though it was, had nevertheless in some respects its advantages. It gave Therese a clearer field for operations. It was necessary for her to concert with Clifford in private their future plans; and this would have been impossible had her old intimacy with her duenna still existed, and Donna Violante exercised, as formerly, the right of entering at all hours the private sitting-room of the young lady, or being her constant companion when she went abroad.

So far, then, all was well. One difficulty was removed, and it was possible for her, either at home or elsewhere, to see Clifford without interruption. Another, and not less formidable, still existed, and that was how to communicate with him, or summon him to an interview. Under these circumstances, Therese decided on calling in the aid of an old servant of the family, of the name of José.

José had been the confidential domestic of her father. He had been a soldier from his boyhood; and on the Count of Gormas first

joining the army, had been sent by the old duke to act as a sort of mentor to his heir. He had faithfully discharged the duty, had followed his young master in all his campaigns, and received him in his arms when he fell in Piedmont, at the battle of Turin, so disastrous to the Spanish monarchy. He had ever since become a sort of appendage to the house of Pacheco, and spent his time in doing anything or nothing, as best pleased him.

But whatever were José's good qualities, there was one for which he was more especially distinguished, and that was his discretion. The Count of Gormas, it was alleged, was in his campaigns rather disposed to forget fair faces at home, in his admiration of those abroad ; and the countess, though the best of all possible wives, condescended to be remarkably jealous. To ascertain if her fears were well founded, many were the questions asked, and many the bribes offered, to his faithful attendant. It was in vain. José was impenetrable ; he had seen nothing, he had heard nothing. No stock, or stone, or lump of clay could, according to his own account, be more unconscious of what was passing around him. The consequence was, that José became

famous. His name, in the family at least, passed into a proverb, and to say, "You might as well try to get anything out of José," was to say that it was impossible.

Therese, without being aware of the precise circumstances which had founded so great a reputation, had a thousand times heard the phrase, and it now occurred to her, that a caballero so distinguished for his silence, was the very person to be employed upon a mission in which silence was the first quality necessary. She accordingly ordered the old man's attendance, and having informed him that she wished to communicate privately with a cavalier upon matters connected with her grandfather, entrusted him with a note to Clifford. José had orders to deliver it without delay, to await an answer, and more especially to say nothing on the subject to any one. The veteran made his usual military salaam, received the precious packet, and without even looking an inquiry, departed. The missive was addressed—"Señor Zuniga, to the care of Don Jamy Gonzales, Calle de la Cabeza."

The young gentleman for whom it was intended was once more established in his original

quarters. Luckily they had never been discovered by the agents of the Cardinal; and by a further piece of good fortune, he had left in them all the important documents connected with his mission on the calamitous day which had witnessed his apprehension in the house of the Grand Chamberlain. Prior to leaving Segovia, it had been arranged between him and Therese that he should once more occupy his former abode, and that he should be addressed by herself, or known to any of the neighbours who might see him enter or leave his apartment, by the name of his mother's family; a name which was not only sufficient for continuing his incognito, but which Therese's heart probably suggested might have some power over her grandfather's prejudices. The Grand Chamberlain was proud of being a Pacheco; but, as his fair relative knew well, he was still more proud of his descent from the chivalrous Zuniga, the celebrated Grand Master of the Order of Calatrava, in the days when the Grand Master of a military order was the equal of a king.

Clifford had recovered his health and spirits. Such at the time, however, had been the effect

of the blows which he had received when driven against the rock, that nothing but the constant care of Perez and his fellow Gitano, had prevented him falling from his saddle on the night of his flight. His conductors, nevertheless, had succeeded in transporting him in safety to a rude hut, belonging to one of the tribe, amid the ranges of the Somo Sierra, and about four leagues distant from the scene of his captivity. There, for two days, he recruited himself. On the morning of the third, the fugitive's strength returned, and though his hands still exhibited traces of past suffering, he was in other respects able to resume active life. He had accordingly started for Madrid. He had no fears of discovery, for the dye of the gipsy had again been at work, and the fair-haired and fair-skinned Englishman had under its influence received the darker tint of Andalusia. Further to aid deception, he was equipped like a Spanish gentleman arriving from a journey, and provided with a long gun and ample saddle-bags; while Perez himself resumed the profession of arriero, and affected the muleteer in attendance upon the traveller.

On the evening of the third day, then, after

having made a considerable circuit, the young Envoy and his companion once more entered the city, but by the Toledo road. They passed unquestioned. The hour selected for approaching the gate had been that of sun-down, when the natural obscurity increased the difficulty of recognition, and the chill of a November night drove all but the soldier on duty within the guard-house. On reaching the Haymarket, and having arranged with Perez the means of communication through a woman of his tribe who lived in the neighbourhood, he made his way on foot to the Calle de la Cabeza. The preconcerted signals were given, the door opened, and Clifford was once more in his old quarters.

It was about nine o'clock on the following day that José made his appearance. He presented his credentials, and Clifford wrote the reply, accompanying it, as he handed it to the trusty messenger, with a gratuity so handsome that José's usually dull eye sparkled with pleasure.

"*Vaya*," said he to himself, as he pocketed his new funds while he descended the stairs, "the caballero is liberal, too liberal, I suspect,

to be a friend merely of the old man's. I doubt, at least, if he does not think more of the señorita than of her grandfather. Well, if Donna Teresa has a lover, it is no matter of mine, and there is not a señorita in Spain better entitled to one. And a Zuniga, too, a relation, no doubt, of the Grand Chamberlain's. Yet who would have thought of his having blue blood in his veins? for, though he be a handsome man enough, he is as dark as a Morisco."

The aged messenger of Cupid speedily found his way back to the Calle de Toledo, and delivered to his mistress the packet entrusted to him. He would then have retired, but a sign instructed him to remain while, with flushed cheeks, she read the short billet. It contained but three lines, and they merely expressed an assent to the wishes of his correspondent. But it was the first letter from one who was dear to her; and who can ever forget the sensations of delight with which such first letter is perused?

When its contents had been mastered, Therese looked at her attendant with embarrassment.

"José," said she at length, "your master's life is in danger, and the caballero you saw to-day has engaged to do his best to save it. But it is necessary that he and I should consult together on the best means for effecting this, and without the knowledge of any of the household: for our success will depend upon our secresy. I have decided accordingly on taking you into our councils. Will you aid us?"

"With the last drop of my blood, señorita, should it be necessary. I carried your noble father off the field at the battle of Turin, when many a one would have shrunk from the risk; and what I did for the Count of Gormas, I would do for Donna Teresa Pacheco."

"I believe you, José. But you must be silent to all—to every one—even to Donna Violante."

"Nay, señorita," said the old soldier, "no one ever heard José speak of what did not concern him. And as for the duenna, saving your presence, I have ever held her something of paroquet. And now, Donna Teresa, I am an old soldier, and forgive me for saying there is

nothing like distinct orders. What am I to do?"

Therese gave the necessary instructions to her punctilious attendant; and having dismissed him, sank into a chair, and abandoned herself to the thousand agreeable reveries which crowd across a young girl's mind when anticipating a meeting with the object of her affection.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CASA DEL CAMPO.

The place selected for the interview of Clifford and Therese was a retired spot in the neighbourhood of Madrid.

On the right bank of the Manzanares, and directly opposite the windows of the royal palace, was a country residence of the King, called the Casa del Campo. The building itself was little remarkable, and had been converted into a menagerie for wild beasts, in Spain, as for many centuries in England, considered the appropriate appendage of royalty. The grounds were upon a more extensive scale. They extended for about two miles along the banks of the river, and were adorned with some

of the finest timber, particularly of the beech species, in Spain. The avenues were planted, according to the taste of the period, in formal lines, having towards their centre a fountain, the universal accompaniment of Spanish pleasure-grounds, and in front of this stood a magnificent equestrian statue of Philip III.

But, great as was its natural beauty, the park was for the most part solitary and neglected. The population of Madrid loved the bustle of the Prado and the Puerta del Sol, and the Casa del Campo remained untenanted, save at intervals, when the privacy of its woods recommended it to hot-headed gallants as an appropriate spot for settling their private quarrels, or as a rendezvous for lovers unable to meet in more thronged localities.

Such was the place which had been fixed on by Clifford and Therese for their meeting. The access to it was easy. The entrance was not a hundred yards from the bridge of Segovia, and thither Therese, on the following morning, took her way, accompanied by José. For further protection, private orders had been sent to Perez, and he and a brother of his tribe lingered near the gate. They had with them

their mules, and a pretended anxiety to let them out for hire offered the Gitano an excuse for addressing her, and thus giving information upon any subject which might be of interest, while the presence of the animals themselves secured to Clifford the means of escape, should escape be necessary.

About the same time that the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain proceeded on her route to the rendezvous, Clifford had started from the Calle de la Cabeza. He found, and without difficulty, the young lady and her attendant near the great fountain, and, leaving José to amuse himself as he best might, the lovers sauntered along one of the many alleys with which the place abounded. It is scarcely necessary to hint to our fair readers of the almost delirious joy of the meeting, or the confidences which were mutually exchanged; the narrative by the cavalier of his descent of the rock and his flight; the detail by the girl of her agonized feelings during the time marked by its progress; of her terror at hearing the hurried visit of the guards to Clifford's room; of her joy at seeing the three lights at the gipsy's hut. Yet, amid all their happiness, a graver

feeling gradually stole over them, for upon both, almost unconsciously, came the recollection that their enterprize was, in fact, but begun, and that Clifford's escape was valueless to both, unless it were followed by the result to obtain which the escape had been made—the preservation of the life of the Grand Chamberlain. To this subject the conversation gradually addressed itself. It was first alluded to by Therese.

"And now, Charles," said she, in reply to an impassioned expression of affection on his part, "let us be serious. I love you—I have promised one day to be your wife, and to you (may the Virgin forgive me!) have I given the dearest hopes and wishes of my future existence. But I have other duties and other affections, which," continued she, as she coloured deeply, "ought perhaps to have been first present to my thoughts. My grandfather—my poor grandfather! his life is in danger. How are we to preserve it?"

Clifford shook his head, and looked grave.

"I will not, my dear love," said he, "disguise from you that the risk is great. No one knows better than yourself that I was furnished with three different means of accomplishing the

ruin of the Cardinal. My letters of credence to the Marquis Scotti, to the father confessor, and to the Queen. Two of them have already failed. I have again this morning communicated with the Parmesan ambassador, and reminded him that I had already transmitted to him his master's letter. He will not stir. I suspect he estimates at a higher rate the favour of Alberoni, than that of the Duke of Parma. The Prime Minister of Spain has more to give than the sovereign of a petty duchy."

"And he will betray you?" said Therese, anxiously.

"No," said Clifford; "that is the only favour he vouchsafes me, for, out of respect to his master, he will be silent. But he will do nothing in my favour, and so vanishes one of the great hopes of my enterprize."

"And D'Aubenton," said Therese.

"He too is lost to us; Alberoni told me on the night of our conference that he had renewed his friendship with the confessor, and were it not so, whatever might have been the intentions of the Jesuit, prior to the arrest of the Grand Chamberlain, *now* they will be adverse

to us; for when did the disciples of Loyola aid a falling cause?"

Therese clasped her hands mournfully as if she were too well satisfied with the reasons to venture a reply to them. She spoke at length, but in a faint tone.

"But the Queen," said she, "still remains to you."

"True; but it is impossible to approach her. The jealousy of her old nurse, Donna Laura Pescatori, is intense, and in virtue of her office as Assa Feta she can exclude whom she will. I had hoped, indeed, to have secured her favour through her countryman, Scotti, but now that he has given me the cold shoulder, that chance also has failed me, and with it all prospect of winning the Queen."

"Alas! alas!" said Therese, "is there no hope then?"

"Nay, love," said her companion, passing his arm tenderly round her, "there is as yet no reason for despair. The trial, as I learned from my host, is fixed for the seventh of next month, and the duke is not to be removed to Madrid till the sixth. This is but the twenty-

sixth of November, so we have still ten days before us; and in the changing atmosphere of court favour, we may possibly in the interim meet with something like sunshine."

The lovers separated only to meet again on the following day, but the second interview was as little productive of hope as the first. Clifford had made a fresh attempt to win the favour of the Parmesan ambassador; but he adhered to his cautious policy, and the prospect of an interview with the Queen seemed as distant as ever. They could not, however, bring themselves to despair, and a third interview was appointed for the thirtieth, in the hope that, during the interval, some fortunate chance might spring up in their favour; and it was looked forward to with a greater anxiety, as it might possibly be the last; for the two lovers on their return to the fountain were informed by José that he had observed, during their walk in the alley, a man carefully watching them. Who the stranger was he could not tell, nor could he even guess at his probable rank, as he had worn a large mantle and broad-brimmed hat—a costume too general to make the distinctions of class easy

to the spectator. It was therefore with a feeling of doubt and anxiety that Clifford and Therese prepared for their next meeting.

The thirtieth came at last, and at mid-day the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain proceeded to the Casa del Campo, accompanied as before by the military attendant of her father. On reaching the gate of the park, to her surprise, she found Perez for the first time absent. In one so attached, it was impossible to attribute his non-appearance to neglect or indifference. And yet to ascertain the real cause was equally beyond her power, for the brother Gitano who had been left in charge of the mules either could not or would not give any satisfactory reason for the absence of his chief. With palpitating heart, she took her way to the fountain, and there she found Clifford waiting for her. Yet even his presence did little to relieve her, for he like herself had remarked the absence of the Gitano, and was equally unable to account for it. But the incident was insensibly forgotten, for anxieties, even greater than that connected with the new mystery, naturally took possession of their minds, and

after having instructed José to follow at a distance, they sauntered towards their accustomed alley.

For awhile we must leave them to their *tête-à-tête*, and return to Perez. It has been already mentioned that the Gitano was in the habit of taking post at the gate, which gave access to the Casa del Campo, but as he feared that he might be an object of suspicion to the authorities, in consequence of the part which he had played in aiding the escape of Clifford, he never made his appearance there till noon, the time fixed by the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain for leaving her home. On the day on which had taken place the two first meetings between Therese and Clifford, there had been nothing to alarm him, and on the present, as on former occasions, he had according to custom taken up his quarters at the usual spot. Scarcely had he reached it, when he was startled by the apparition of a hated form coming from the city and crossing the bridge of Segovia. Distant as the object still was, the quick eye of the gipsy had no difficulty in recognizing Don Ambrosio. Agitated by the presence of a man who had ever been the harbinger of evil to him and to

his tribe, he instantly entered the gate, and took refuge amongst the copse-wood which clothed on either side the extreme boundary of the pleasure-grounds, and there from his place of concealment watched the approach of his old enemy.

Unconscious of observation, the Andalusian entered the park, and took his way leisurely towards the fountain which formed the usual rendezvous of the lovers. Apparently he expected to have found some one in its neighbourhood for he approached cautiously, and on ascertaining its solitude moved slowly round it, peering as he did so down the alleys, which diverged from the fountain as from a common centre. At this moment a new figure appeared on the scene. She was a stout, vulgar-looking woman of about sixty, but notwithstanding her age, her neck was bare and encircled with a string of magnificent pearls, while on her fingers were numerous diamond rings, seemingly of great value. Her dress was somewhat like the Spanish, for a mantilla was on her head, and she carried a large fan. But there the similarity ended. There was no saya of black silk, so universal in the Peninsula. On the contrary,

the gown was of gay colours; but though of the richest materials and newest fashion, it was worn with the air of one who had not been accustomed to the finery, at that period of life when the manners and the bearing of the wearer borrow in some degree a permanent character from their garment.

As the new-comer passed near the Andalusian, the splendour of her jewellery caught his eye, and appeared to suggest an idea, for, after a moment's reflection, he abandoned the search in which he had been hitherto occupied; and affecting the air of a lounger, sauntered off, adopting, however, as the scene of his promenade, the avenue down which the portly dame was now moving. Perez, too, followed in his turn. He had dogged his enemy from the park-gate, and now kept as near him as the covert would permit.

In the meantime, the two lovers had gained the retired avenue which witnessed their daily promenades. Scarcely had they entered it, than they heard a scream—it was clearly a woman's voice, and seemed to proceed from a narrow alley which crossed, at some distance, the greater avenue, but which, from the thick-

ness of the brushwood which clothed its edge, was invisible except at the point of contact. Again the scream was heard in a louder tone. Clifford made a sign to José to approach; and having consigned Therese to his charge, hurried forward to ascertain the cause.

He was not long in discovering it. On gaining the end of the alley, he saw, about a hundred yards to the right, a group whose relative positions at once explained the mystery. By a small tree near the edge of the alley stood a stout, elderly woman. Her mantilla lay upon the ground, her dress was disordered, and her arms were bound to the tree with cords, while near her were engaged two men in mortal combat; and notwithstanding the distance, Clifford had no difficulty in recognizing in them Perez and Don Ambrosio.

He rushed towards them; but ere he could approach, the struggle had terminated. The gipsy had been unable, with his knife, to guard himself against the passes of the sword of the Andalusian; and as Clifford came up, a successful lunge had driven the weapon

through the chest of the Gitano, and the poor wretch sank to the ground with a groan. Scarcely had he fallen, when Don Ambrosio became aware of the approach of a third party, and he instantly recognized him.

"Valgame Dios, señor contrabandista," said he, as a savage joy sparkled in his eyes. "The saints are favourable to me to-day: to have the happiness of meeting, and at the same moment, both my friends of the Bocca Chica!"

"Murderous ruffian!" shouted Clifford. "The happiness is mine! You escaped me once—you shall not do so again!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" said Don Ambrosio, with a taunting laugh. "The lover of Donna Teresa Pacheco is jealous of a rival, and probably a successful one; for a little bird has whispered in my ear, that Alberoni would pay high for the capture of the contrabandista; and it may be he will not think the damsel's hand too extravagant a price."

"Scoundrel! defend yourself," was the reply. And the swords crossed instantly.

The parties were equally matched. Disso-

lute as Don Ambrosio was, he had still all the accomplishments of a Spanish noble, and among these was a perfect command of his weapon; and Clifford speedily found that he would require all his skill. In the first instance, indeed, it appeared that the combat would go against him, for, irritated by the sarcasms of his antagonist, he had lost temper, and exposed himself incautiously. A slight wound, however, on the outside of the sword arm at once recalled his self-control. With his usual *sang-froid*, returned his power of judgment, and he determined, for a while, to act entirely upon the defensive, and content himself with parrying the lunges of the Andalusian.

In proportion, however, as Clifford recovered calmness, Don Ambrosio lost it. Confident of his superiority, he had in the first instance entertained no doubt of the speedy termination of the contest in his favour, and had signalized with a cry of triumph the lunge which had drawn blood from Clifford's shoulder; but the unexpected protraction of the combat irritated his fiery temper. He became, in turns, angry, excited, desperate, till at length he lost head altogether,

and thrust furiously, but without discretion or special object. The extravagant exertion produced its natural results. His foot became less steady, his wrist less firm, and the attack wavered from pure want of physical strength to continue it.

The exhaustion did not escape his keen-eyed opponent. He had hitherto rested upon the left limb, the head thrown back, the body motionless, and the iron hand ever in front but unchanging in its position, except in the half-curve which, at intervals, it described from the wrist, and with which, as if without an effort, it had baffled the lightning-like movements of the long rapier. As, however, the thrusts became less frequent, and the weakness of his adversary apparent, all at once Clifford gathered himself up as if for immediate action.

"Now, scoundrel!" shouted he, in a voice of thunder, and as his eyes flashed fire, "now it is my turn! This," said he, as he passed his sword through the fleshy part of Don Ambrosio's arm, "this is for the wrongs of Manuela!"

The Andalusian gnashed his teeth with pain.

"This," continued Clifford, as he once more made the point of his blade felt in the right loin of his opponent—"this is to avenge Perez, and this, Don Ambrosio, is to revenge your outrage upon Donna Teresa Pacheco!"

The words were ominous and may shadow out the result. The hidalgo had made a lunge, but reeling with pain, it had been weak and ill-directed. Clifford parried it with the full strength of his powerful arm; and as the point of the weapon flew up, he seized, with his left hand, the Andalusian by the wrist, and with his right, buried his rapier in his throat. Don Ambrosio fell dead.

No sooner was the tragedy over, than he turned to Perez. The poor fellow was still breathing, but it was evident that life was ebbing rapidly. Yet even in his last moments did there live, warm as ever, the passions of his race, for he had watched with an anxious eye the struggle between his old fellow-traveller and his great enemy; and as Clifford approached him, there seemed to pass over his

face a slight smile as if of gratitude. But there were others who also had a place in his memory, for his lips stirred; and it seemed to his companion as if he had pronounced the the word "Señorita!"

"She is here, Perez—my poor Perez, she is here!" said Therese, as she approached, and fell on her knees by his side.

The gipsy took her hand, and faintly and with difficulty raised it to his lips. Scarcely had he done so, than he started as if he had felt the influence of some internal spasm. Almost at the same moment, the blood rushed in torrents from his mouth, the limbs stretched themselves, the eyes dimmed, and the devoted servant of the house of Pacheco lay on the ground a corpse!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASSA FETA.

The causes of the appearance of the Andalusian in a spot destined to be so fatal to him, were simple enough. Ever since his unfortunate adventure at the Somo Sierra, the dissolute hidalgo had deserted the highway. The loss of his horse, a necessary appendage to the highwayman of the eighteenth century, had formed an insuperable bar to his continuing his profession; for his poverty prevented his making an expensive purchase, and nothing but an animal of high blood, with its concomitant excellences, speed and endurance, could enable him to carry on his old trade with safety or success. He had no resource, therefore, but to

make his way to the capital, where alike the largeness of the population offered him security, and his skill in games of chance supplied the means of acquiring from time to time funds for existence. It was while so employed, that among other places of casual resort, he had made his way to one of the city gates; and there, while engaged in conversation with the officer in charge, an acquaintance of his own in better days, he had learned the anxiety of the Cardinal for the capture of the contrabandista, and the reward which was to accompany it. Further questioning led him to the conclusion that the party, in whose arrest Alberoni took so much interest, was his old acquaintance of the Somo Sierra; while his recollection of the terror displayed by Perez, at the chance suggestion thrown out by him that the Gitano was employed as a political agent between the capitals of France and Spain, led him to the further inference that the contrabandista, as well as his guide, might be employed in the same dangerous diplomacy. The idea at once pointed out a new course of operations to the Andalusian.

"Could I," said he to himself, be lucky

enough to capture this political intriguer, my fortune is made. The Cardinal remunerates service highly, and I shall have the double pleasure of filling my empty pockets, and revenging myself upon one who has so successfully marred my plans."

The idea was at once adopted and acted on. The difficulty, of course, was to obtain any clue to the probable whereabouts of his old acquaintance. It was in vain that he perambulated at all hours the streets of Madrid, and with inquisitive eyes studied the appearance and bearing of any of its masquerading population, who in height or in manner reminded him of the contrabandista. His search was fruitless, for Clifford was at Segovia. At length, chance gave him the success which had been denied to his best efforts. The profligate young noble had expended his last peseta; and on the day of the second interview between Clifford and Therese at the Casa del Campo, he betook himself at an early hour to the same spot, in the hope that in some of its secluded alleys he might improve his exhausted finances by the robbery of some solitary lounger. There he had unexpectedly seen Clifford and Therese meet at the

fountain. He had watched them; and his espial, as has been already mentioned, was remarked by José.

The prize he had so long desired was almost within his reach; yet how to seize it was the difficulty. If he gave information to the officials, he knew enough of his countrymen to be aware that the higher authorities would claim the merit and receive the reward. To secure to himself the future bounty of the Cardinal, it was necessary that he should capture the prize alone. The subject required meditation.

"*Ca!*" said he to himself, "now that I have got upon foot of the game, it will be easy work for the future. It is evident that this fellow and the girl have a regular rendezvous at the fountain; and from day to day will I watch them until I have arranged my plans."

Accordingly, on the following morning, and for three successive days, the Andalusian was on the spot, but in vain; for the interview of the lovers had been postponed until the thirtieth. On that day, too, came Don Ambrosio; but from repeated disappointment, hoping little, and consequently reckless of observation, he arrived at a later hour than usual. As before, he made

his way to the fountain ; and it was there, and while watched by Perez, that he saw pass the stout old woman in the rich drapery. The value of the jewellery caught his eye; his necessities were pressing, and he determined to sacrifice for the moment his love of revenge to his avarice. He followed her into the wood.

In the meantime, the dame had quitted the broader avenue, and entered one of the more retired alleys which crossed it at intervals. Into this, also, went Don Ambrosio, and seeing no one near, had immediately commenced an attack upon his portly companion. The party assailed, however, aged though she was, made so vigorous a defence, that the Andalusian had nothing left for it but to drag her to a sapling near him ; and to this he bound her by a cord which he chanced to have in his pocket. It was at this stage of the proceedings, that Perez, who had dogged his enemy, made his appearance, and by his shouts released the old dame from the violence of her assailant, only to draw it upon himself. With what followed our readers are already acquainted. Neither the skill nor the knife of the Gitano availed him against the superior science and longer weapon

of his opponent; and poor Perez added one more to the number of the victims which the house of Pimental had exacted from his race.

Clifford and Therese had with tearful eyes watched the last struggle, and now that it was over, they still continued to gaze in sorrow on all that remained to them of their humble friend, when they were recalled by a scream to the recollection that the violence of Don Ambrosio had yet another victim. The poor woman bound to the tree had, during the continuance of the mortal struggle, been silent from terror, but now that it was over, her fears returned, and she gave vent to them by repeated shrieks. Clifford at once proceeded to relieve her anxieties by unbinding her, and assuring her of safety. The old dame seemed much disposed to be grateful; for after expressing volubly her thanks in a language which seemed a strange mixture of broken Spanish and Italian, she concluded by flinging her arms round her protector's neck, and giving him some dozen violent and repeated hugs:

"Oh! excellent young man!" said she, as soon as returning confidence enabled her to give

articulation to her words, "how shall I thank you—how shall I repay you?"

"Neither, Madam, is necessary," said Clifford. "That poor fellow," continued he, referring to Perez, "was my servant; and putting to death this ruffian, avenged my own wrongs as well as yours."

"And yet," replied she, "I am not the less grateful; and I would prove my gratitude. What is your name?"

"It matters not, Madam," said the young Envoy, rather embarrassed by the request; "nor do I sell my kind acts. But I must be gone, love," said he, turning to Therese, and whispering in her ear, "I must be gone, and that instantly. I see already some people approaching, and if I am detained to give evidence with regard to this brawl, farewell to my incognito, and all hope of saving the life of your grandfather. I will leave the park by the south gate, and as you return to the bridge of Segovia, José can inform the Gitano with the mules of the fate of his unfortunate comrade."

He was about to move off as he spoke, when the old woman laid a violent hand upon his arm.

"You are not going," said she, "you are not about to leave me here to be robbed and murdered! I am sure that ruffian has other companions in the wood. I am positive that I shall never be allowed to reach the bridge of Segovia alive."

It was in vain that Clifford endeavoured to reassure her. Her terrors were too great to permit her to listen to any argument; and she continued to detain him with a grasp which he was unable without positive violence to shake off.

In the meantime, the men whom Clifford had seen in the distance, rapidly approached. As they came nearer, their dark-green uniforms proclaimed them to be a portion of the soldiery employed in acting as the police of the royal parks, or what are called in France, *gardes champêtres*. The alarm, too, appeared to have spread; for others in the same uniform appeared at the opposite end, and made escape impossible. Therese gave a scream, and even Clifford could no longer restrain his temper.

"Be satisfied, Madam," said he, in a bitter tone to his companion, who still continued to grasp his arm convulsively, as if existence

depended upon the tenacity of her grip. "Be satisfied with your day's work. I have saved your life, and you ruin me."

"Ruin you!" repeated she, in tones of astonishment. "I ruin you! Oh, excellent young man, you are mad!—I would make your fortune!"

"And you have done it thoroughly," said Clifford, in a tone even more bitter than before. "Do you see those men there in the green uniform!"

"Yes, they are the Park guards. They are the soldiers of the King and our friends."

"Friends of yours they may be, but not friends of mine. They will commit me to a dungeon."

"For this day's work?" said his companion, in a contemptuous tone. "I will soon arrange that!"

"Not for this day's work, perhaps—but yet even that will serve as well as a better cause; for if I am brought before the Audiencia, I am ruined—for I must tell my name—and I have an enemy."

"Who is he?" said his new acquaintance, sharply. "I will protect you against him."

"Pshaw!" was the only reply vouchsafed by Clifford to what he deemed the extravagant assurance of his companion.

"It did not seem, however, to disturb the good dame's equanimity, for, in a more commanding tone than before, she repeated:

"His name — young man, tell me his name?"

Clifford knew not what to do. The soldiers were approaching fast, and a few minutes were likely to seal his fate. As for poor Therese, she stood by, the picture of terror—clasping her hands, and the tears streaming down her cheeks. All at once, she seemed to have adopted a resolution, for she hurried up to her lover, and seizing the only disengaged arm, whispered:

"Oh, my dear Charles! trust her!—trust the good woman! I know she will not betray you!"

"Bravely spoken, girl!" said the elderly dame, whose quick ears had caught what was not intended for her. "The good woman will not betray him—though if you had said the good lady, it would have been more respectful, and suited better your place and mine."

Therese would have apologized.

"Pooh, pooh, wench!" said her companion, bluntly. "No offence. I am sometimes not over ceremonious myself. And now, young Sir," continued she, turning to Clifford, "speak, or in another moment you may not have the opportunity!"

For an instant and no more, Clifford hesitated.

"Pshaw!" he said to himself, "in half an hour all must out; and if Madam Curiosity here cannot aid, I do not well see she can injure me. I will even tell her!" And he bent down his head, and whispered in the ear of his new acquaintance: "The Cardinal!"

The intelligence did not seem either to surprise or alarm his self-proclaimed ally, for she simply repeated in an interrogative tone:

"Alberoni?"

Clifford nodded.

"I guessed as much. And now," muttered she, "I will read a lesson to my other *protégé*. These handsome young men are always forgetting themselves!"

And with the words, she turned her back

on the new-comers, and drew her mantilla over her face.

In the meantime, the five or six soldiers first seen came up. They were headed by a remarkably good-looking officer of about twenty, who, as his eye caught sight of the two corpses, lost no time in displaying his claims to authority.

"Seize me that man and these two women!" said he, pointing to Clifford and his two companions. "And cut me down that scoundrel by their side," directing the attention of some of his satellites to José, who, with the instinct of his old vocation, had drawn his sword, and was preparing to do battle for his mistress. "Cut him down, I say! Pretty doings in the Royal Park indeed, when men are murdered in open day!"

But the orders of the gallant lieutenant of gendarmerie were not destined to be obeyed; for as his subordinates were advancing to execute them, the old dame turned suddenly round, and threw back her mantilla. The Medusa's head would not have produced greater consternation; for as officers and men gazed at the face now displayed to them, there issued

from their lips the unanimous exclamation of "Donna Laura!" and all, as if by the common action of some internal machinery, sank upon their knees, and bent their heads to the earth.

A quiet smile stole across the features of the old woman as, with a side glance, she marked the astonishment of Clifford and his companion. She then, with a stately step, approached the prostrate leader of the detachment.

"You said right, Don Gregorio," continued she, addressing the lad. "Pretty doings in the Royal Park when men are murdered at mid-day, and where I myself, but for the aid of this gallant gentleman, might have been robbed, stripped, and assassinated. Was it for this that I pleaded your cause with a certain lady of our acquaintance, and had you made ranger of the Royal Park of the Casa del Campo? Ah! *Briccone!*"

And the dame took hold of the ear of the youthful officer, and pinched it soundly.

Apparently the act had something in it of a consoling character, for the lad ventured to look up, and regarded his patroness with a pair of

large black, laughter-loving eyes, which, notwithstanding their affectedly imploring character, were full of fun and roguery. The lady replied to the glance by giving her *protégé* a smart blow on the head with her fan.

"Well," said she, "for once I will pardon the carelessness; but beware for the future—so you may kiss my hand. And now to business. As to this scoundrel," continued the dame, pointing to Don Ambrosio, "you will give the body to the public executioner. As to the other poor wretch, who died in my defence, he is a retainer of this caballero, and he will himself give orders as to what is to be done with him. And now, Don Gregorio, begone, and have these nasty dead bodies away with you; but let two of your men remain in the neighbourhood to take care of my safety, and await my return to my own apartments."

The officer obeyed immediately the orders of his patroness. The rest of his soldiery had now arrived. Some of these took up the body of the Andalusian, while others, at the suggestion of Clifford, raised that of Perez, and under the superintendence of José, prepared to carry it to the gate, there to deliver it to the

brother of his tribe. This done, as the crowd was beginning to increase, Clifford made another effort to withdraw. But once more his aged companion arrested him.

"Not yet, señor," said she; "you do not go yet! You have done Donna Laura Pescatori a service, and she is not ungrateful. You have an enemy—Alberoni. The miserable wretch! Many a time when he was but a gardener's boy, a ragged, ill-fed boy, have I given him a plate of soup to keep him from starving. Have no fear of him; for though the hound now arrays himself in silk and satins, and writes himself 'Prince,' my power is even still greater than his. I will do you service. Are you a soldier? If so, let that accursed rogue of a priest, prime minister, oppose it as he will, I can give you rank."

Clifford shook his head.

"I must fry the fish, then, after another fashion. If you are poor, I can give you crowns, and in plenty."

Again Clifford gave a sign of dissent.

"*Cospetto*, man," said his new patroness, "what want you then?"

Clifford said nothing. In fact, for some

time past, his busy mind had been ruminating upon the chances which Fortune had thrown in his way. Before leaving Paris, he had been made acquainted by Dubois and Lord Stanhope with the private history of the Spanish Court; and the two experienced diplomatists had not forgotten Donna Laura Pescatori, the Parmesan nurse of the Queen, who now held the post of Assa Feta, or first woman of the bed-chamber, and whose power over her royal mistress was notoriously absolute.

Still no effort had been made to gain her favour, and no means devised of introducing their representative to her notice, as the ambassador of England and the prime minister of France had believed themselves certain of obtaining for Clifford an audience of Elizabeth Farnese through the Marquis Scotti. How the ambassador of Parma had refused to obey the orders of his master and fulfil the expectations of the English and French governments, is already known; and his desertion of their cause had hitherto proved one of the great obstacles to the success of the young soldier's mission.

The events of the last half-hour had, how-

ever, opened up chances of success hitherto undreamed of. The alliance of the nurse was quite as valuable, and was likely to prove more hearty than that of the ambassador, and through her means might be obtained that access to the Queen which the marquis had refused to assist in procuring him.

All this, which has taken some time to describe, had been rapidly passing through Clifford's mind, and he decided on availing himself of the aid of his new acquaintance; the more readily too, as the intense hatred of the nurse for the distinguished statesman, who had been the playmate of her childhood, was notorious. But, short as the delay had been in forming his resolution, it had exhausted the patience of the old lady, and she repeated her question in a harper tone.

"What want you, I say? You are young, you are bold, you are skilful with your weapon, you are handsome, and such have ever wishes or ambitions. Speak, I will ensure their success."

"Madam," said Clifford, removing his hat, and bowing with great respect, "you are right. I have wishes and ambitions, but I fear to

mention them, because they are so extravagant, that even your power, great as it is, is not great enough to aid them."

"You know me then?"

"I heard your name, Madam, and that is sufficient; for who has heard of Donna Laura Pescatori, and is ignorant of her power?"

His new acquaintance seemed gratified by the answer.

"*Per Bacco*, boy," said she, "you speak prettily. You must needs make rare way with the petticoats. But, as to my power, you are right. I do possess it, and I would use it in your favour; so speak boldly."

"Madam," said Clifford, "my wishes, as I informed you, are extravagant; and if I err in expressing them, I pray you to blame not my presumption, but your own kindness. I would have an audience of the Queen!"

The Assa Feta started back in astonishment.

"*Cospetto!* child," said she, "you have the glance of a falcon that would fly a high flight, and your words do not belie your looks. But it is useless. The days of the Count of Melgar

are past, and fair as your face is, the Queen would not look at it."

Poor Therese blushed deeply, and even her more unsophisticated lover coloured to the temples.

"Pardon me, Madam," said he, "you have accused me of a presumption which had never crossed my thought. I would but speak with her Majesty."

"And upon what subject?" said his companion, testily. "Cavaliers like you do not entertain royal ladies with the goodness of the last crop of olives, or the price of vermicelli a pound. Upon what subject, I say?"

Clifford was silent.

"Hark ye, young Sir," said Donna Laura. "The Queen was my nurseling, and many a time, when that vixen mother of hers drove her by ill-usage from the great drawing-room of the palace of Parma, she would come to me and cry herself to sleep upon my lap. I was her only friend when she had no other, for no one but myself cared for the poor orphan; and now that she is a great dame, and has a hundred simpering courtiers, who look grave when she looks grave, and smile when she smiles, I

sometimes suspect that I am her only friend still; and I will not admit any one to her presence unless I be assured that the object of the interview is to benefit her and her children. Why then, I ask, do you seek an audience of the Queen?"

Clifford stood undecided, and over his ingenuous brow thought after thought chased each other rapidly. The watchful eyes of Therese marked them as they passed, and understood them well.

"Yes, my dear Charles," said she, "you must trust Donna Laura. Why should you not trust one who owes you so much? Nay," continued she, as her lover still hesitated, "I can guess the reason of your doubts. You fear to risk the life of my grandfather on the chance. It is natural. The responsibility should be mine, and I will not shrink from it. Donna Laura," continued she, turning to her, "I will tell you everything. I am Donna Teresa Pacheco, the grandchild of the Duke of Escalona. The Cardinal has sent him to Segovia, and intends in a few days to try him for his life, out of revenge for my grandfather having struck him in the King's presence; and so

my—" and Therese paused and coloured, and after an instant's hesitation continued, "and so this gentleman would seek an interview with the Queen, to induce her to use her influence with Don Philip to dismiss the Prime Minister."

"Ha!" said the Assa Feta, turning towards her companion with eager interest. "So you are the child of the old grandee who thrashed this gardener's boy, whom they have put into scarlet stockings? By my word, I honour you, wench, for your ancestry! And you, Sir," continued she, turning to Clifford, "would ask the Queen to turn the fellow out? Good luck to your efforts, say I. But I doubt their success. Her Majesty is a mother, and as the children of the Savoyarde, her predecessor, take crown, kingdom, everything, it is natural—and I do not blame her—that she should wish to get an establishment for Don Carlos and her other little ones. Now, between ourselves—it is this that gives the power to the Cardinal. He has promised to obtain such an establishment, and, however much I may dislike the man, I must say that my mistress's interest will compel her to support him."

"And if," said Clifford, "such an establishment could be secured to her family by other means, would she still support him?"

"Not a day—not an hour—I would not permit it. I tolerate this scoundrel only for the sake of the giovinetti."

"Then, Donna Laura," continued Clifford, "it is possible that I may have the power to assure her of such," and he smiled.

The boast, if such it was, was evidently listened to with incredulity, for it was in a tone of contemptuous disbelief that Donna Laura exclaimed:

"*Vaya!* you! a private person!"

"I am not a private person."

"But you are a Castilian?"

"I am not a Castilian."

"But a subject of Don Philip?"

"I am not a subject of Don Philip."

"Diavolo! He is mysterious—the youngster. What are you then?"

"A foreigner, and sent by foreigners to the Queen."

"Per Bacco! But they might have given you a more sure means of access to Her Majesty than the chance rescue of an Assa

Feta in a royal park. Who was to have introduced you?"

"The Marquis Scotti."

"And he has failed you?"

Clifford nodded.

"Ah! the old rogue! I should have guessed as much. Well, I shall be the trustier ally. You pledge me your word, *da galantuomo*, that you come on this business?"

Clifford bowed.

Donna Laura welcomed the assent with a nod; but suddenly a new thought seemed to cross her mind, and her features assumed the character of irritation.

"I doubt you not," said she at length; "but the Queen is suspicious, and if I ask her to see you on no better grounds than what you have told me, she will believe that I am narrating a tale out of a story-book. If it be true that you are sent to her, you must have some distinct message."

"I have. I hold a letter to her from His Highness her uncle, which I am instructed to deliver privately and in person."

"From the Duke of Parma?"

Clifford nodded.

"Basta! basta! That's enough. Then I will do your bidding. To-morrow there is at ten o'clock a sitting of the Council of Castile, and it will occupy the King till mid-day. Do you see," continued she, as she led the way towards the open ground on the side of the river, and pointed to the palace opposite. "Do you see that old bastion wall there, that runs all the way from the round Moorish tower as far as the open space in front of the palace?"

Clifford gave a sign of assent.

"Well," continued his monitress, "at the end of it, near the corner of the wall of the barracks of the Spanish guard, is a wicket. Be there at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and you will find it open. Pass through it and follow the footpath till you reach the door of the Moorish tower. On the right-hand side is an iron bell-handle; pull it gently, and I will be there to conduct you to the Queen; and remember, if you have a court-suit wear it, for Elizabeth Farnese is jealous of respect."

Clifford was profuse in his thanks.

"Not a word, boy," said the Assa Feta. "I do what I ought for my mistress' interest as well as yours. And you, my child," continued she,

turning to Therese, "have you no favour to ask of me?"

The girl timidly replied that she had no claim upon her kindness.

"Yes you have. You twice told that unbelieving fellow to trust me. So out with your request, for you have taken me in a lucky moment, and I cannot choose but grant it."

"My grandfather's life," faintly articulated her companion.

"Bah! that of course. I love the old grandee for having thrashed the mitred scullion of Vendôme; though, on second thoughts, it may be as well to say nothing at present on the subject to the Queen, for your mother, if I recollect, was a relation of the Ursins, and Elizabeth Farnese loves not the princess or her kindred. But is there no one else in the world in whom you take any interest?" and she looked maliciously towards Clifford.

Therese blushed crimson.

"Ah! I see, it is as I expected," continued her companion. "Well, you need not colour so, child; it is very natural. I always myself had a soft heart for a handsome young man, and

that lover of yours is very handsome! The rogue, too, has such a wheedling tongue of his own. I am not sure that even now I would venture to trust myself with him. Ah! you laugh, *Briccone*," continued she, turning towards Clifford, "and you think me sixty, no doubt; it's a mistake, I am only fifty-five. But even if I were sixty, every woman likes a lover as long as she has eyes to see and ears to listen to him. But now be off with you, and by the south gate. For this matter I see has been buzzed abroad, and there are more people coming from the bridge of Segovia than you need to meet with. It shall be my care that Donna Teresa reaches home in safety.

With these words the old dame took Therese's arm within hers, and moved towards the great entrance of the Casa del Campo, followed by the two guards, who had been left as her escort. For an instant Clifford stood still to watch the retreating form of his lady-love, and to receive the adieu which the glance of her eloquent eyes threw back to him over her shoulder. He then, too, left the spot which had been the scene of so many important events, and made his way through a side gate, which led from

the park to the southward. On gaining the open country he turned to the left. Half an hour's walking brought him to the Toledo road, and by it he reached in safety his quarters in the Calle de la Cabeza.

CHAPTER IX.

THE QUEEN AND HER NURSE.

We must for a moment leave our hero to the solitude of his apartments, and follow the portly dame, whom he had saved from the harpy hands of Don Ambrosio.

Donna Laura Pescatori, the Assa Feta of the Queen, had been nurse to Elizabeth Farnese. The wife of a Parmesan peasant, and herself one of the lowest classes, and exhibiting in her voice, manner, and language, hourly proofs of her origin, she nevertheless concealed under a coarse exterior no small portion of tact and shrewdness. These qualities, together with a sincere attachment to her nurseling, had transferred her from the rude hut which had been

her original residence, to the scarcely more sumptuous apartments of the infant princess. Such as they were, however, they formed to the child a city of refuge, in which she sought an asylum from the ill-usage of her mother, and the neglect of the ducal domestics. The storms without only served to make her prize more fondly the eager, loving face that awaited to welcome her within, and her nurse became her amost only companion—the ever-sympathising confidant of her loves and her hates, her hopes, her wishes, her fears.

Under such circumstances, it is easy to understand that the influence of Laura Pescatori over her charge became paramount; and when the intrigues of Alberoni placed upon the head of Elizabeth Farnese one of the mightiest crowns in Europe, it was natural that the dependant, who had shared her adversity, should be invited to partake of her brighter fortunes. Her nurse followed her to Spain, but no longer the insignificant person which she had been in the palace of Parma. She tacked Donna to her name, arrayed herself in silks and velvets, made no secret of her influence over her mistress, and was courted, carressed, and feared. Still the

new exterior grandeur changed in no respect the inward woman. She was coarse, vulgar, and overbearing as ever, and expressed herself with regard to all around her, king and grandee not excepted, in epithets, expletives, adjectives, and interjections of so Doric a character, as to throw even the courtiers of a lax age into a state of blushing and tribulation.

The Queen herself offered no opposition to the sayings or doings of her attendant. It is astonishing how fixed and long-lived are the habits and feelings of infancy. The awe inspired in the boy survives in the man; and we doubt, if the fiercest warrior that ever lived, is not in the height of his glory, to a certain extent controlled by the appearance of his old pedagogue. And so it was with Elizabeth Farnese. She had never got over the obedience which had marked her early childhood, and her imperious spirit bent before one more imperious still.

It might be, too, that affection lent its aid to rivet the bond. The Queen of Spain was detested by her subjects, and returned their hate with interest. But every human heart must have some object to love, and the Italian prin-

cess, in the palace of Madrid as in the palace of Parma, was glad to retire from the flattery of scheming ladies of the bed-chamber and deceitful courtiers, to the society of one who, however coarse her habits and nature, was at least honestly attached to her. Thus Donna Laura was to the Queen what La Roche was to her husband; and if Marly and Versailles, and recollections of France formed the staple of the one *tête-à-tête*, the other was as lavishly imbued with the associations of infancy, and a longing for return to the country and the people from which both had sprung.

It was about two hours after the scene of the adventure of the Casa del Campo. At the further end of that gallery of the palace, with which the reader is already acquainted, and through which Therese had passed to her interview with Philip, was a room of no great size, and plainly furnished. Its only occupant was a lady of about six-and-twenty. She was tall, slender, and well made, and would have been considered handsome, but that the face was marked with small-pox. Still the features had lost little of the original grace of their outline; and the lofty forehead and intelligent eye, while

they in no degree detracted from the feminine character of the countenance, gave evidence of a mind and energy which commanded the respect of the spectator. Young as she was, she had her hair powdered, and twisted upon either temple into a single curl, while behind, it fell on her neck in two long ringlets, each terminated by a knot of blue ribbons. In other respects her dress was little remarkable. It was of dark silk, edged round the neck with lace, displaying, according to the fashion of the time, much of the bust, and fastened in front by a brooch set in diamonds.

The expression of Elizabeth Farnese, for the solitary occupant of the plainly-furnished apartment was the Queen of Spain and the Indies, was haggard and care-worn, and she paced backwards and forwards within the narrow boundaries of her room, much with the air of a lioness in a cage.

Her meditations, of whatever character they were, were interrupted by a hurried rap at the door; and Donna Laura, without awaiting the permission of her mistress, entered. The Assa Feta was still under the excitement of the morning's adventures, and with the volubility of her

sex and country, she proceeded to give vent to her feelings.

"Ah, mia cara, mia cara!" said she, clasping her hands with all the energy of an Italian, "what an adventure! what a calamity!"

The Queen paused in her hurried walk, and then, in a tone of bitterness not unmixed with sarcasm, she said:

"What you, Laura? And, as usual, the harbinger of some evil fortune. To whom has it happened?"

"To me, carissima."

"I guessed as much; ever more grumbling! I have sometimes thought, that it might teach you a valuable lesson were I to give you a better cause for it. If the Assa Feta of the Queen of Spain were compelled for a month to share as of old her chestnuts and her maize with the pigs which she was feeding for the market, she might be the better able to appreciate properly her present prosperity. What has happened," continued the Queen, in a mocking tone, "to Donna Laura Pescatori? Has she, as usual, lost her kerchief or her shoe-buckle?"

"No, no, cara—a real calamity!"

"What, something more dreadful?" continued

her royal mistress, in the same tone of sarcasm; "some of my liege subjects, I suppose, have forgotten to doff their beavers to so important a personage as the first woman of my bed-chamber."

"Per Bacco!" said her irritable attendant. "If the Assa Feta of your Majesty had met with such a want of respect, it is your Majesty and not I that should have resented it."

"And why, pray?" said Elizabeth Farnese, with the most provoking coolness.

"Cospetto! the thing is clear enough. Laura Pescatori might walk the streets of Madrid by the year, and were she merely Laura Pescatori, no one would take the trouble either to ban or bless her; but when the Manolas shout as I pass, 'There goes the nurse of the Parmesan! There goes the she-wolf that suckled the Farnese! May the Virgin curse her and her brood!' it is your Majesty, and not your poor servant, that is dishonoured by the scandal."

"You are right, Laura," said the Queen, in accents of deep melancholy, "it is I and not you that am dishonoured by the scandal. They love me not, these Spaniards. Even my pre-

sence cannot impose upon them respect. I never go beyond the gates of the palace but they insult my ears with the praises of my predecessor: 'Long live the Savoyarde!' is ever the cry. Well, I sometimes have wished that the Savoyarde lived still. Better that it should have been so, than that her successor should have gained her throne only to see her children sacrificed for those of another woman. Yes," continued she, "yes, they love me not, and I—I hate, detest, loathe them. Strange," continued she, turning to her nurse, "that in all this wide kingdom, I—its sovereign—should have but two friends, you and Alberoni."

"If you treat not the scullion of Vendôme," said the old woman, pettishly, "better than you do me, it can scarce be said that you spoil those friends of yours by affection."

"What, in anger, Laura?" said Elizabeth Farnese, with a gay laugh, whose clear, ringing notes, and the genial smile which accompanied it, marked her extraordinary versatility of temperament and feature. "Come, let us shake hands, and forgive."

She extended her fair fingers as she spoke, but her advances met no reply. On the con-

trary, the old woman plumped her portly person down upon an arm-chair, and composing face and limbs into the most perfect rigidity, sat the personification of sullen petulance.

The Queen seemed accustomed to the mood, for with a smile, she took her place behind her attendant's chair, and stooping over her shoulder made several unsuccessful attempts to kiss the cheeks that were sedulously turned away from her.

"Madre mia," said she, in a coaxing tone, "would you be angry with your child? Fie, fie, my dear Laura, my good Laura, you will not be so silly. Come now, I was wrong, I confess I was wrong, and I will do penitence for my fault; for you shall tell me your story, the whole story from beginning to end, and I will listen to it without a yawn, or a pout, or an exclamation—come, now. Will you not tell me the story?"

With the words, Elizabeth Farnese moved to the front of the chair, and sitting down on the knees of her attendant, passed her arm round her neck, and fixed her beautiful eyes upon her face with a glance of the strongest affection. The Assa Feta made two or three

slight attempts to dislodge her, and some half-dozen times the eyebrow was lowered, and the mouth repeated its pantomimic expression of sullen humour. It was in vain; Elizabeth Farnese retained her place, and the bright, laughing eyes gazed more affectionately than ever. All at once the ice thawed. The old woman clasped her nurseling convulsively in her arms, kissed her a thousand times on cheek, and forehead, and lip, exclaiming at intervals: "Anima mia! you know I love you. How can you thus torture your old nurse?"

"Well, well, I was wrong," said the Queen, "but you must, as I said, forget and forgive; and so, now tell me your story."

And she rose, and drawing a chair to the side of Donna Laura, seated herself, clasping her hands gravely, and affecting with playful mockery to give to her features and manner the character of deep attention.

"Well, carissima," said her attendant, unable or unwilling to see anything in her mistress's mood but a decorous anxiety to listen to an important communication; "you must know that I was in the Casa del Campo to-day, taking my walk as usual, when a ruffian attacked me,

and I should have been robbed and murdered, had it not been for an angel in the shape of a handsome young man."

"Ah! Laura, Laura," said the Queen, shaking her head, "the old story; you are as susceptible as a girl of fifteen; you are always meeting with angels in the shape of handsome young men. If there were robbers in the royal park, what was your other angelic juvenile about? for if I recollect aright, you persuaded me to make lieutenant of the Forest Guard, there, a certain Don Gregorio, who was also, to believe you, an Adonis."

"Ah, he came to my rescue too; though I confess, somewhat late; but the rogue looked contrite, and I shall give him a lecture on his carelessness in private. But the young man who freed me from the robber, really was an angel."

"No doubt of it," said the Queen, laughing; "and I suppose he is intended to be ranger of some other of the royal parks, for I take it for granted, you are about to ask my good offices for him."

"Cospetto, mia cara, you are right. But

I doubt if a rangership would suit him. He wants something else."

"A favour, Laura?—a favour, of course. Well, I guessed as much. What is it?"

The Assa Feta appeared embarrassed, and made no answer. The Queen marked her hesitation, and interpreted it justly.

"I fear," said Elizabeth Farnese, gaily, "the robbery is like to cost me dear—but the debt must be paid. What is this angelic youth's request?"

"An audience of your Majesty."

"Laura!" said the Queen, as she sprung to her feet, "are you mad? Do you know the risk and danger of Philip's jealousy? It is impossible."

"Not impossible, cara," said the nurse in an apologetic tone.

"Yes, Laura, impossible! you know how much my credit with the King has been shaken by my supporting Alberoni in the late unfortunate war, in which he involved us. Upon retaining that credit depends the future establishment of my children. I will not peril their interests for the whim of a stranger."

"Nor will I, carissima."

"Then why ask me to grant the audience?"

"Because I believe that it may benefit the little ones. Do not I love the giovinetto Don Carlos as if he were my own? and would not I sacrifice life to see him a crowned king?"

"I believe you, my dear, good Laura; I believe you. But what has all this to do with the stranger, or this interview?"

"Answer me first, this, cara. Why do you support Alberoni?"

"Laura, you know as well as I do: because he promised to obtain for my child the Investiture of Parma and Placentia. Does not the whole happiness of my children and of myself depend upon its attainment? It kills me, I tell you, to think that the son of the Savoyarde will have an empire, and mine not even a petty province. And then myself; if Philip should die, what would be my position here? Why, already the Prince of the Asturias treats me with the most marked disrespect; and were he king to-morrow, would probably send me to a nunnery to sleep away the best days of my existence in a distant province, amid a parcel of half-idiot women. No, no," said she, as she rose,

and began pacing backwards and forwards in the apartment, "I must have that investiture, come what may."

"For five years, carissima, you have been attempting to gain it, and have failed."

"Alas!" said the Queen, wringing her hands, "it is but too true."

"Yet you have employed for the purpose the powers of a great kingdom—troops, fleets, money."

"True again; but why madden me by repeating this?"

"Because my mother-wit tells me that the troops, the ships, the money, were enough, if they had been well directed, to have gained you what you want, and more. If they have failed, it must have been from the blundering of the man that guided them."

"Laura, Laura! your hatred to your old gossip makes you unjust."

"Not a whit; I but repeat what everybody says, and everybody knows. But if I detest the fellow—it may be a little too bitterly—you go as far wrong on the other side, for you worship him."

"It is false! I only employ him because I conceive him to be the best agent for obtaining independence for Don Carlos."

"And if," said the Assa Feta, in a meaning tone, "you found that he was a bar to obtaining that independence, would you still keep him in his post?"

"Why do you ask?"

"For a reason I have."

The Queen mused for some time.

"My first duty," said she, at length, "is to secure the interest of my child; and if I found Alberoni in the way of his advancement, I should no longer retain him in office. Nor could he justly complain, for if he did me once a great service, he has been amply repaid."

"And that's God's truth," said the old woman, in a violent tone. "He *has* been well repaid. You brought with you two dependants from Parma, him and myself. You made *me* Assa Feta. I do not complain. It was enough, and I am content. But what have you made *him* —a gardener's boy, a scullion of Vendôme, the son of poor Piero Alberoni, my next neighbour as used to be, the mighty lord of a *possessione*, consisting of half an acre of olive-ground—why,

bishop, archbishop, cardinal, grandee, with a yearly pension of twenty thousand ducats from the Order of Alcantara, and fifty thousand from his bishopric of Malaga, and a hundred and twenty thousand from his archbishopric of Seville; and he, the ugly, squat, short-necked scoundrel, to give himself airs forsooth, and affect not to see me, his old playmate and gossip, who am as good as himself, and was better than himself. I could tear the wretch's eyes out." And the Assa Feta, in the violence of her indignation, started from her seat and like her mistress paced the room rapidly.

The anger of her dependant, however well founded it might appear to herself, seemed to strike the Queen as ridiculous, for she burst out laughing.

"Your dislike, my dear Laura," said she, "to your old acquaintance ever discomposes your philosophy; but whence this new outburst of passion against him? or where in all that you have said, supposing it were true, am I to look for a reason for granting an audience to your new *protégé*; for he, at least, can have nothing to do either with me or the Cardinal."

"Wrong, carissima; he has much to do with

both. The proud priest locked up the lad in a dungeon."

"Unpleasant enough; but what have I to do with that?"

"Only that you were the cause of his being sent there."

"Come, come, Laura! that is a little too much: I will undertake to say that I never saw him, or heard his name."

"Possible enough, for he has just come to Madrid, the bearer of a letter from the Duke of Parma to your Majesty."

"From my uncle?"

The Assa Feta nodded.

"And why," said Elizabeth, her eyes flashing fire, "have I not had it ere this?"

"Because the lad's orders were to deliver it privately, and in person."

"What could have induced the Duke to send me a special messenger?"

"That's clear enough; important business—not a doubt of it."

"But there can be none such between him and me, except the settlement of the duchies?"

"I guessed as much, carissima; that's precisely the conclusion I came to."

"But why this mystery? Why not forward the missive through the regular channel of Scotti, his ambassador?"

"The bloated old rogue of a marquis has the reputation of pocketing freely the Cardinal's ducats; and his Highness probably feared that if Scotti had the fingering of the outside of the despatch, his brother rogue, the priest, would have had the reading of its contents."

The Queen mused for some time.

"If Alberoni," muttered she, to herself, "be so anxious to prevent its delivery, it must be adverse to his interests."

"I guessed that too, carissima," said the old nurse, with a chuckle; "that's precisely the conclusion that I came to, or I should not have asked an audience for my friend of the Casa del Campo. But I trusted him at once, as soon as I found that he hated the Cardinal as the devil hates holy water."

"But how is all this to be effected without the risk of discovery and ruin? When and where can I see him?"

"Easily enough. The Council of Castile sits to-morrow at ten. The King must preside, and for two hours you will be free. I will bring the

young man by the staircase of the Moorish tower, which opens into my apartments, and from thence hither."

The Queen paused, as if in doubt.

"There is no danger, carissima," said her nurse, "and the interests of the giovinetto are at stake."

The last remark seemed to decide Elizabeth Farnese.

"Well, be it so," said she; "I will see him at ten."

"And if he grant Parma and Placentia on condition of the dismissal of that red-stocking priest, the fellow goes?"

"He does, or at least he shall, if the King will be persuaded by me."

"Oh, the brute! oh, the beast!" said the old woman, clenching her fist, and with eyes which sparkled with fierce passion. "A pretty king, indeed! If he refuse you, I could find it in my heart to strangle him ere he were a day older. But he can never," continued she, as with true Italian versatility her features relapsed into a smile, "he can never resist those beautiful eyes of yours. No, carissima, Alberoni must

go ; and when I see the fellow stripped of his gay plumage, I shall once more breathe freely ; for that man's pride and ingratitude, after all the cheese-soup I have given him, have for the last five years kept me well-nigh choking."

And the Queen and her attendant parted.

CHAPTER IX.

PARMA AND PLACENTIA.

At a quarter before ten o'clock on the following morning, Clifford started for the postern, although it was with some degree of fear that he contemplated approaching it. He was well aware of the keen eyes of Alberoni and his satellites, and nothing but the great prize at stake would have induced him to venture into the neighbourhood of the residence of his quick-witted enemy, and that at the most busy period of the day. To diminish, however, the risk as much as possible, instead of taking the shortest route by the square in front of the main entrance of the palace, he made his way through the Haymarket, and thence to the

steep descent of the ground which led from the city to the bridge of Segovia. The further side of this was bounded by a stone wall. It was the fence of the palace gardens, and terminated at one end in the river, and at the other connected itself with the ancient bastion at whose extremity was the portal designated by Donna Laura.

As soon as Clifford reached the stone fence, he took out his flint and steel, lighted a paper cigar, and, with the air of one who was doing his best to lounge away the tedious hours, followed the line of the wall towards the postern. On reaching it, he turned lazily round, and took a survey of his neighbourhood. No one was near him. He pushed the door; it gave way to his pressure. He entered, and closed it after him. On the inside was a pathway which led to the foot of an old round tower, and along this Clifford moved rapidly. At the end of it he found, as the nurse had forewarned him on the preceding day, a narrow, massive gate, with an iron bell-handle in the stone-work by its side. Clifford rang gently; the portal was immediately opened by the Assa Feta in person. She beckoned him in, carefully re-bolted the

door, and hurried up the spiral staircase that led from it, followed by her companion. On reaching the top, she turned to the right, along a narrow corridor, and entered a room at its farther end. The door of this also she bolted, and then for the first time addressed her *protégé*.

"You are punctual, my friend," said she. "But I suppose," she continued, with a smile, "that at your age, when a lady is in the case, punctuality is no uncommon virtue. And now off with your cloak, and let us see if you have obeyed my instructions, for the Queen is but a woman after all, and every woman likes to see a young man well-dressed, even though she does not intend him to make love to her."

With the words she pulled from Clifford's shoulders the large blue mantle which formed then, as now, the nearly universal upper garment of the middle classes in the Peninsula.

"Bravo!" continued she, as the young envoy stood before her in the rich court-dress of the period. "Nothing could be better! The coat of black velvet—true Genoa, as I live!—and the ruffles and cravat of the richest Mechlin, and the broad sword-belt and the

steel-handled rapier! Ah! you rogue, how handsome you are! Had I been ten years younger, I am not sure that I could have defended my heart. But I am an old woman now, old enough to be your mother, and I have given up all these follies."

And the dame, as if to prove her words, took hold of Clifford's chin with her fore-finger and thumb, and imprinted upon his lips a salute which, nevertheless, had in it very little of maternity.

"And now," continued she, "I will go and see if my mistress is ready. She knows of my obligations to you, and is not unwilling to repay them."

Donna Laura left the room as she spoke, and returning almost immediately, beckoned to the young envoy to follow her. Clifford obeyed, and, after passing through two or three low-ceiled, gloomy-looking apartments, was introduced to the presence of Elizabeth Farnese.

The Queen looked pale and care-worn. To say the truth, she had passed a sleepless night. The leading feature in her character was maternal affection, or perhaps, to use a more accurate phrase, a passion for the aggrandisement of

her children. To this had been directed all her energies. For this she had made Alberoni prime minister, and for this also she had supported him in the long war which had been terminated only three months before by an uncertain truce, and which, though it was waged professedly for the honour of Spain, had, in fact, no other end than the attainment of a kingdom for Don Carlos. In the early part of the struggle, the ambition of Elizabeth Farnese had pointed successively at Naples and Sardinia, and Sicily; but as its results became less and less auspicious, she grew more moderate in her demands, and at length would have gladly compromised her claims to greater empire, for the recognition of her son as the heir of Parma and Placentia.

Upon the part of the old Duke, there was no difficulty. He was warmly attached to his niece and her children, but unhappily his personal predilections were of little avail. Great nations bestow themselves. Smaller principalities, whatever be the desires of the people or the prince, are ever the gift of the mightier dynasties in their neighbourhood, whose interests are likely to be affected by the personal cha-

racter or connections of the future ruler. Of all this the Queen was well aware, and it was therefore with a throbbing heart that she saw the unknown envoy, the bearer of the missive from her relative, enter the room.

Clifford bent one knee to the ground as the formal ceremonial of the period required. When he arose, Donna Laura had vanished, and he found himself alone with his royal hostess.

"Señor," said the Queen in a low voice, whose well-modulated tones fell gracefully on the ear, "I have been informed by my nurse that she is indebted to you for safety and for life. She has been my attendant since infancy, and I hold a kindness done to her as one done to myself. In her name, therefore, and in my own, I thank you."

Clifford bowed.

"I would do more," continued the Queen. "My influence in this kingdom of Spain is not so great," continued she, with a smile, "as people would allege, and yet, small as it is, it is still great enough to benefit those who serve well me or my friends. In what can I aid you?"

"Madam," said Clifford, "I return my grateful thanks to your Majesty, but I have

nothing to ask save what you have already granted, the honour of the present interview."

"And yet that interview," said Elizabeth, with a smile, "must have had its object."

"It had. His Serene Highness the Duke of Parma has addressed this letter to your Majesty, and I have the honour to be its bearer."

And Clifford, as he spoke, drew a packet from his bosom, and again sinking on his knee, presented it to the Queen.

Elizabeth carefully studied the superscription and the seal, as if a momentary doubt had come over her; but as she gazed, her brow cleared again, and she tore the billet open and read as follows:

"Private and confidential.

"My dear niece,

"We are fallen on evil times, and to me the unhappy issue of the last war threatens the most serious results. The Emperor not only refuses to acknowledge my power to transmit the duchies by will, but hints a doubt of my present right to possess them. For me unaided

to make opposition to the house of Austria, would be madness. In France and England alone rests my hope for the present, and yours for the future. They have undertaken to forward you this by a trusty messenger, and with him you may safely confer upon all matters touching our common interest.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"FRANCIS."

The Queen's cheek paled as she read, and she directed an anxious glance to her companion.

"Señor," said she at length, "my uncle writes me on family affairs. If it were not against the rules of diplomacy," continued she, with a forced smile, "I would ask if you could guess at the tenor of this letter?"

"Madam," said Clifford, "I know its words. The Duke sent a copy of it to Paris, to the ambassador of England, and to the Cardinal Dubois, and by them it was communicated to me."

"Indeed!" said Elizabeth. "They know, then, the unjustifiable intentions of their ally. What do they say to them?"

Clifford was silent.

"What, señor," continued his companion, in an excited tone, "has honour, then, left the earth? I should have hoped that the representatives of two great nations would have had too much generosity to have tolerated such a gross act of spoliation."

"Madam," replied Clifford, "will you permit me to say that the representatives of great nations are but trustees for the interests of others, and the duty of a trustee requires not generosity, but justice."

"And do you call this justice? Is it just that the Duke of Parma should have his states forcibly taken from him?"

"There may be injustice in the Emperor towards the Duke, but to ourselves, at least, there is justice in not interfering with his plans."

"Ha! Sir diplomatist, how prove you that?"

"Because, Madam, to oppose them effectually would require troops, and money, and men; and how could we answer to our sovereigns for having expended their resources on what concerns them not?"

"But still good feeling might suggest such an act."

"Madam," said Clifford, with a smile, "will you permit me to observe that for the last five years Spain has endeavoured to deprive his Majesty George the First of his kingdom, and the Duke of Orleans of his regency."

"And rightly," retorted his companion, with a flashing eye; "for the house of Stuart has a better claim to Great Britain than the Elector of Hanover, and my husband to the regency of France than the Duke of Orleans."

"Madam, I will not argue the question. I would merely venture to suggest that my master and his Royal Highness the Duke may possibly entertain a different opinion; but whether they do so or not, it would, will you permit me to say, be asking too much of human nature, to suppose that they would willingly incur expense for the benefit of a country which, rightfully or wrongfully, has been their untiring enemy."

"You speak of Spain, Sir diplomatist, but you forget that the injury at present is not done to Spain but to Parma."

"Madam, forgive me for saying that Parma is Spain. The relationship of the Duke to your

Majesty and his tried fidelity to your house cause him to be considered as a dependant and his states as a dependency."

"Well, Sir, have it as you will. I will no longer argue the matter, either upon the basis of justice or generosity. It is clear that on the present occasion any hope of attention to either would be misplaced. I will argue it simply as a matter of interest. The influence of France and England depends upon the maintenance of the balance of power. If Austria obtain Parma and Placentia, the Emperor would become too strong for his allies, for he would be paramount in Italy."

"The danger is great, Madam, but it is, at least, distant. If Parma and Placentia remain with the Duke, there is a still greater danger for the allies—there is a present one."

"In what?"

"Because the duchies remain, in fact, a part of the Spanish monarchy, and secure its supremacy in northern Italy."

"And where is the present danger? There is now peace between us."

"For three months, Madam, there has been.

Who can tell if it will exist for three months longer?"

"What should prevent it?"

"Forgive me for saying so, but a cause sufficiently notorious—the restless ambition of the Cardinal."

"Of Alberoni?"

"Of Alberoni."

"This is too insolent, señor," said the Queen, rising from her seat. "Your masters in Paris know the minister is a Parmesan like myself, and they would insult me through him. Confess now. Is not the whole of this spoliation scheme of the Emperor got up for the purpose of blotting out the house of the Farnese? For years has Spain defied your united power, for its councils, whatever might be the apparent agent, were really directed by a woman. You knew this, and when you learned the intention of my uncle to leave the investiture of his duchies to my child, you determined te revenge yourselves for your baffled policy on me by depriving my children of their birthright. It was well done—it was nobly done: worthy of those who say honestly that they do not affect gene-

rosity, and who might have added that they have an equal contempt for justice;" and the Queen once more flung herself into her chair, and regarded the young envoy with an expression of unutterable scorn.

Clifford was embarrassed, and for a while there was a dead silence. It was broken by the Queen.

"Well, Sir," said she, "why do you stay here? Why do you not go? I take it for granted you have performed the honourable mission with which you were entrusted. You came to tell me that the allies had decided that my children should be plundered. You have performed your task; now begone."

Clifford did not move. His delay seemed to irritate his companion; for again she repeated, in an excited voice:

"Begone, Sir, I say. You know nothing of diplomacy. Will you force me to add that you are equally ignorant of politeness?"

Clifford for the moment looked as if uncertain how to act. He then sank upon one knee.

"I obey you, Madam," said he, in a low tone. "And yet, will you permit me to say

before I leave the room, that on one point you have misunderstood me."

"Ha! I guessed as much," retorted his companion, her eyes flashing fire, "I cannot comprehend the use of common words. I am a dolt, a fool, an idiot."

"Madam, the fault was mine; I must have expressed myself unhappily. What I said, or what I meant to say, was: that there is no wish on the part of my masters to deprive the princes of your family of their inheritance."

"What, Sir! would you deny your words? Did you not tell me that the Emperor was about to take possession of the duchies, and that England and France would not interfere?"

"Madam, I said that England and France had no interest to interfere, so long as the intentions of Spain were understood to be hostile to my master and the regent."

"And I informed you, Sir, that they were not hostile."

"And I, Madam, took the liberty to reply that so long as the Cardinal was the minister of your Majesty, it would be impossible to disabuse my masters of their belief in the danger of hostilities."

The Queen was silent for a minute.

"Do I understand aright," continued she, at length, "that there is no opposition on the part of France and England to my uncle's granting the investiture of the duchies to my son?"

"None whatever, Madam, provided—"

"Provided what?"

"They saw at the head of your Majesty's government a native-born Spaniard."

"Provided, in short, the Cardinal were removed."

"They fear, Madam, his restless ambition, and his Italian associations."

"I repeat my question, Sir; provided the Cardinal were removed?"

Clifford bowed.

The Queen paused a minute as if in thought.

"And supposing," continued she at length, "he were removed. In what do I benefit by this?"

"You have, Madam, the good wishes of the allies."

"I have no belief in faith without works. The Emperor remains as formidable as ever. He will still retain the will to deprive my uncle

of his duchy. Will he still be permitted the power?"

"No, Madam; my masters ask of you to dismiss the Cardinal. If you grant their request, you will pacify Europe. The boon is a great one, and their gratitude will be proportionate."

"They will ensure," said the Queen, eagerly, "the investiture of Parma and Placentia to Don Carlos?"

"Madam, they will do more—they will add Tuscany."

"Ha!" said Elizabeth, starting to her feet; "that would be a principality worth having! And they guarantee this? They will guarantee it, you say?"

"*Provided*, Madam," replied Clifford, resting strong emphasis on the word, "Alberoni be dismissed from his post, and from the kingdom."

"Ah! true—true, I had forgotten; and that same dismissal may be no easy matter." And with the air of one over whose sunshine of happiness had come a sudden cloud, she once more sunk down in her chair, and was silent. Suddenly she started. "You will excuse me,

señor," said she, "we talk of matters on which depend the fate of nations. I have the greatest confidence in one honoured by bearing the letter of the Duke of Parma, and yet in affairs so momentous I must have better evidence than your personal word. Have you any authority for what you have been telling me?"

Clifford drew a packet from his breast, and placed it in her hand.

"It is addressed to myself," said she, with a smile, so I may take the liberty of opening it. Yes," muttered she, after she had finished its perusal, "nothing could be handsomer; nothing could be more complete. The three duchies are guaranteed to Don Carlos. My child will have a principality worthy of him, and I a refuge in my widowhood from the insolence of that detested Prince of Asturias, who ever addresses me as if I were a peasant's daughter. And when, Sir," continued she, turning suddenly to Clifford, and colouring deeply as she recollected the involuntary confidence into which she had been betrayed; "when will this guarantee be officially notified to the court of Spain, and to the Emperor?"

"When the condition, Madam, is carried

out, and the Cardinal is once more a private man, and in Italy."

The remark seemed to have called back painful recollections, for the Queen covered her face with her hands, and abandoned herself to her own thoughts. Her meditations lasted for some time, and appeared agitated; for not unfrequently, she changed her position, as if under the influence of strong emotion. She looked up at length; there was a tear in either eye, and the face was pale; and it was in a voice slightly tremulous that she said:

"I accept the conditions, Sir; and if it depend upon me, ere a week be over, Alberoni shall have ceased to be prime minister. But now leave me, for our interview has tried my nerves, and I need repose. And yet, ere you go, give your address to the Assa Feta. If I should succeed, you shall be informed of it. And now, farewell."

She rang a handbell as she spoke. The summons was immediately answered by Donna Laura, and under her guidance, Clifford was once more conducted down the staircase of the Moorish tower, and he returned in safety to his own quarters.

CHAPTER X.

A CONJUGAL TÊTE-A-TÊTE.

It was seven o'clock in the evening, the hour at which Elizabeth Farnese generally received a visit from the King. On the present occasion, she evidently expected one; for she was dressed with more than usual care, and every aid which art or nature could supply, was employed to set her off to the best advantage. And now, seated in the recesses of a large *fauteuil,* she awaited the arrival of her husband. The cue she intended to adopt was that of soft melancholy; and happily for the truthfulness of the representation, it was unnecessary to affect it; for her spirits were low, and the excitement which she had for months felt from her anxiety

to gain an establishment for her children was now increased to an indefinite extent by the guarantee of the allies. A principality for Don Carlos was almost within her reach; it depended but upon one condition. Would that condition be granted? She hoped so. And yet the uxoriousness of her husband was so mixed up with his obstinacy, that it was impossible to guess at the result. It was, therefore, in no unagitated mood that she saw the door of her apartment open, and the King enter.

Philip was in gayer spirits than usual. His step was firm; and his large sleepy eye sparkled for the moment with intelligence. His gallantry, too, seemed to have borrowed new strength from his vivacity; for as soon as he had entered, he remarked the sadness imprinted on the countenance of the Queen, and hastened to her side.

"What ails," said he, "the best of women? You know I am always miserable when there is a shadow upon your brow," and he took the hand of his fair helpmate, and bowed on it, after the fashion of Sir Charles Grandison.

"Ah, flatterer!" said the Queen, "you are

like the rest of your sex—you praise but to deceive."

"You, my love," said his Majesty, gallantly, "have no right to make such a complaint. Your charms would fix any one, even the most fickle. Judge then of their power upon me, the most constant, the most faithful of men."

"Fair words these," said the Queen, coquettishly, "but the lip is a bad witness for the memory, and you too may forget when absent."

"Ungenerous!" said Philip, "how can you torture me with undeserved suspicions? You know that I have not a desire but for your happiness—not a thought but how to give instant effect to your wishes—not an aspiration but that I might live and die here."

As he spoke, Philip sank on his knees before her, and clasping her hands between his, imprinted some passionate kisses on the tips of the fair fingers. The adulation apparently produced some effect upon the Queen; for in a tone, in which affection and doubt were alike mingled, she whispered:

"Ah! that I could believe you!"

"And why should you not, love?"

"And why should I, carissimo? If a

jewel were dropped on the pathway, would not a thousand hands be extended for its possession? Nay, even were it appropriated, would not there still be a perpetual struggle to snatch the prize from the fortunate owner? You are my jewel —earth contains nothing so beautiful. Can you not understand, then, my perpetual dread lest I should be robbed of you and of your affection?"

Philip's face flushed with pleasure at the praises of a person which no one idolized more than himself. In another instant, however, his features became grave; and in a tone of affected modesty, he said:

"It is enough, love, if I meet your approbation; for the dearest object I have on earth is your affection. I would have it great, overwhelming—such, in short, as mine is for you."

"And you love me, Philip?"

"Love you! I adore you!—I worship you!"

"Ah, deceiver! suppose I were to ask you to prove the affection?"

"Ask, and ask boldly," said her impassioned husband. "As Ahasuerus said unto Esther of old, would I not give thee even unto the half

of my kingdom? Come, what is the request?"

The Queen appeared to hesitate.

"Come, my angel," said the King, fondly, "I see there is some boon to be asked. Why not name it, and have it granted?"

Once more Elizabeth hesitated. It was but for an instant, however; for bending forward, and flinging her arms about his neck, she whispered in his ear:

"Dismiss Alberoni."

The words seemed to act like a galvanic battery upon Philip; for hurriedly freeing himself from the caresses of his Dalilah, he started to his feet, and in accents of inexpressible astonishment, he said:

"Madam, my ears must have deceived me! It is impossible that I can have heard you aright! May I ask you to repeat your words?"

"They were simple enough, my dear Philip," said the Queen—"Dismiss Alberoni."

"Madam, I am still lost in astonishment. It was at your own especial request that I made him prime minister."

"True: and it is therefore just; if I find

the trust unworthily bestowed, that I should be the person to request your Majesty to withdraw it?"

"But in what has he offended you?"

"Why, he is constantly making war."

"My love, it was by your own express orders."

"But then he has been beaten everywhere. He has lost armies, fleets, provinces; I never ordered that."

"That he has been unfortunate, is but too true; but we must charge the ill luck, not to his intentions, but it may be to want of forethought, combination, or energy."

"And why, if he has none of these qualities, should he continue what he is? A blundering minister is the ruin of a kingdom; and the ruin would and will be laid at our doors, if we, who have the power to dismiss him, retain him in his post only to accumulate on our heads fresh calamities."

The King shook his head, as if in dissent.

"Is that not enough?" said the Queen, pettishly; "would you still defend this man? What can you see to admire in him? But,

if you are indifferent to his success as a minister abroad, are you equally so to his want of respect to his sovereign at home?"

"How! he never was disrespectful to me."

"He was so to me. It was but yesterday I asked for some paltry ducats to complete my new summer palace in the mountains. He refused them; and not only refused them, but had further the insolence to tell me, that I thought more of being Countess of San Ildefonso than Queen of Spain."

"That was wrong—very wrong. The Cardinal should have used no such language. And yet, forgive me for saying so, there was to a certain extent an excuse."

"Ha!" said the Queen, haughtily, "and what was that?"

"He said your Majesty asked five hundred thousand ducats."

"Well!" said Elizabeth Farnese, with flashing eyes. "If I had asked five million, what mattered it? Your namesake expended seven millions and a half in building the Escurial, and why should a King of Spain *then*, be entitled to spend more than one *now*?"

"But it is you, love, and not I," said the

King, in a soothing tone, "who are building at San Ildefonso."

"Well, is it not exactly the same thing? Is this, Sir, your affection? Would you separate the interests of husband and wife?"

"No, no, love. You shall have the money, though I do not well know where it is to come from; for the Cardinal spoke of the country as ruined by the war."

"The excuse is a paltry one. Alberoni must know that there is money enough in Spain."

"But," said Philip, mildly, "it belongs to my subjects."

"No, Sire, it belongs to your Majesty. Did not Père le Tellier, the Jesuit confessor of your grandfather, tell him that all the property of the subject belongs to the sovereign? And do you doubt the word of a priest?"

"No, no, no," said Philip, crossing himself devoutly; "I do not dispute that."

"You will dismiss Alberoni, then?"

"The Cardinal," said the King, soothingly, "committed an error in not complying with your wishes. It shall be redressed; you shall have the money you asked for. But, as this is

your only charge against him, it will be unnecessary to dismiss him."

"But it is not my only charge against him."

"Why, what other fault find you in him?"

"The man is as ugly as a baboon, and as rude as a bear!"

"And would you," said Philip, in accents which made no attempt to veil his astonishment, "would you have me send away my prime minister for that?"

"Certainly. Is it not sufficient cause? But you do not love me; you never did love me. Your heart and your affections are in the grave of my predecessor. You loved, you love only the Savoyarde!"

And the Queen buried her face in her hands, and sinking into one of the corners of her chair, affected to burst into a paroxysm of sorrow.

It seemed to agitate the King, for he approached and whispered tenderly in her ear:

"You are wrong, Elizabeth; I never loved Marie Louise as much as I love you!"

"It is false, treacherous man! You loved

her more, and I will prove it. Who won the battle of Almanza?"

"The Duke of Berwick."

"Who, when your Majesty was a fugitive, destroyed your enemies, and brought you back to Madrid?"

"Why, the Duke of Berwick."

"Who, in fact, fixed the crown upon your head?"

"I do not dispute it—the Duke of Berwick."

"Yet this best of all possible friends your Majesty dismissed. Why?"

The King looked conscious, and was silent.

Elizabeth's face brightened with a smile of triumph.

"Well," said she, in bantering accents, "if you will not tell me, I will tell you. It was because this Marie Louise—this predecessor of mine—this wife whom you did not love so well as myself, told you he was 'a great brute of an Englishman,' and that she could not tolerate at court his boorish manners. Ha! Don Philip, is this true or not true? Answer me, on your honour."

"Madam," said her husband, "if the Duke of Berwick was dismissed, it was when we had no further use for him, or at least when we could do without him; for Villars supplied his place, and we had in him another general. But you would have me send away Alberoni. How are we to supply *his* place? Where am I to find another minister?"

"Why not, like your forefathers, be minister yourself?"

"I, minister!!" exclaimed Philip, in an accent of astonishment to which no punctuation could do justice. "Do you think, Madam, that I am mad? My great-grandfather tried that whim. He one day quarrelled with Richelieu, and told him he intended to take the government into his own hands."

"It was a noble and a brilliant act."

"So was not the result. Why, Madam, within an hour—within an hour, mark me—three waggon loads of papers arrived at the gate of the palace—every packet being marked *immediate*. My great-grandfather had the courage to open five—but he was taken ill with exhaustion as he was untying the sixth! and—"

"And the waggons," said the Queen, with a sneer, "returned to whence they came, and Richelieu remained in office. I see the trick."

"Madam, it was no trick; it was a great moral lesson. I know none which ever made such a strong impression on me; and I never even think of it, without registering a silent vow that nothing would induce me to imitate the folly of my ancestor."

"And this is the affection you spoke of! This is the tenderness, the love, you so much vaunted! But I knew it—I was sure of it! Ah! why did my evil fortune ever make me Queen of Spain?"

The remark seemed to irritate the King, for he flushed crimson, and once or twice crossed the chamber as if in thought. Suddenly he stopped in the neighbourhood of the Queen's chair.

"Madam," said he, in a slightly sarcastic tone, "to be Queen of Spain is a position which is naturally below the acceptance of any woman, and more especially of one so distinguished as the niece of the high and mighty Prince Francis, Duke of Parma and Placentia. But if I have brought the misfortune on you, I can at

least remove it. I have often, as you well know, doubted the validity of the will of Charles II. my predecessor, by which alone I hold this throne. My grandfather on his marriage solemnly renounced, in the face of Heaven, all claim to Castile for himself and his descendants; and I feel that I tempt the justice of Heaven by continuing to hold a crown which belongs of right to another. Ere long it is my intention to renounce it. As for myself, I will follow the glorious example of my predecessor, the Emperor—I will betake me to a monastery, and there in meditation and prayer seek pardon of the Divinity for broken oaths and violated treaties; and you, Madam, freed from the burden which you tell me now presses so heavily on you, may seek elsewhere for the happiness which I and my kingdom have in vain attempted to afford you."

As he spoke the King moved towards the table, in the centre of the room, and rung twice with violence a hand-bell that lay on it.

"La Roche," said he, to the premier valet-de-chambre, who had immediately answered the summons; "lend me your arm." And leaning

on his faithful attendant, Philip left the room unopposed by the Queen, who remained paralysed in her chair at the announcement of an intention which her fears had often anticipated, and which threatened such utter ruin to all her varied projects of ambition.

In the meantime Philip pursued his way along the gallery, still supported by his favourite domestic.

"La Roche," said the King, at length, in a low faint voice, "you are single?"

"I am, Sire."

"Then, as a friend, I will give you a piece of advice. Be content with that happiness and remain so; for no one," whispered he, confidentially, "but the man who has tried it, can tell what a thing it is to be married."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOUR BOTTLES OF VALDEPENAS.

On the following morning Clifford received, through the medium of the Assa Feta, intelligence of the failure of the Queen to effect the fall of the Cardinal-minister. The disappointment was felt severely, for, to say the truth, the blow was unexpected, as it was generally understood that the influence of Elizabeth Farnese with her husband was paramount. And so, in fact, it was in every matter which did not touch upon his own indolence. She might make peace or war, might give rank to officers in the army or civil service, might expend at pleasure the resources of the monarchy; she might, in fact, do what she pleased, so long as

her whims affected Spain and not its sovereign; but when she asked Philip to exile Alberoni, she went beyond these limits. To dismiss a minister was, in fact, to appoint his successor, and that, in its turn, demanded care, forethought, action; and the King, who cordially detested all three, had stoutly refused to enter upon a course which would have interfered with his lounging in his easy-chair, and disturbed that do-nothing existence which he dignified with the name of philosophy.

Such were the reasons why Elizabeth Farnese had failed. But whatever were the cause, the calamity was felt deeply by Clifford. What pained him scarcely less, was the necessity of announcing it to Therese. Yet, ungrateful as the task was, he felt it imperative to make the communication, and as speedily as possible. But how and where? The tale of sorrow could best be told at a personal interview, and yet there was difficulty in finding a place adapted for it. The Casa del Campo, the scene of so many harrowing events, was not to be thought of; and after long deliberation, it appeared to him that the least-suspected locality would be the residence of Therese herself. It would be

easy to approach the palace of Escalona by the gate in the bye-lane through which he had made his first entrance, while the apartments of the heiress of the mansion were not less accessible; for he had learned incidentally that they opened from a stone terrace, connected by a flight of steps with the garden, and could thus be reached without the necessity of passing through any portion of the main building. By this route, therefore, he determined on seeking Therese's presence, and on José making his appearance, instructed the worthy veteran to announce his intended visit to his mistress, and to be himself in waiting at the garden-gate at ten o'clock.

Some half-hour before the time appointed, Clifford started for the rendezvous. The sky was dark and cloudy, and the streets of the Spanish capital, melancholy at all times from the universally-closed windows, were doubly so under the influence of the shades of night. No lights were visible, except the small lamp which burned at either end of the street, in front of the statue of the Virgin, occupying a niche in the wall. The gloomy thoroughfares were, however, by no means deserted. Here passed a group of ladies, often of the very highest rank,

who, though they kept their features carefully concealed by their wearing white mantillas, proclaimed their intention of having come forth for a freak. These were surrounded by young gallants, who bantered them with the most extravagant compliments, but who seemingly on many occasions had the worst of the combat, for the replies of their veiled opponents frequently produced shouts of laughter from the companions of the unhappy cavaliers to whom they were addressed, and proved that the retorts told. In another portion of the street would pass some young noble on horseback, on his way to a meeting with the lady of his love, while on the crupper behind him was seated a well-armed lacquey. At present his business was merely to carry the guitar of his master, but when arrived at the rendezvous he had other and more difficult duties to perform, for he had then not only to hold the horse and act the scout, but not unfrequently to engage in desperate combat, in defending himself or his liege lord against the vengeance of some relative of the worshipped fair one. In a third quarter appeared a lady on a balcony. Below, a cavalier with a guitar would be singing serenades in her honour, while some two or three

gallants, friends of the lover, and armed to the teeth, lounged against the wall near him, ready to protect his retreat in case of attack.

Through scenes such as these Clifford made his way. He traversed the Calle Real, and passing through the new street of St. Isidro, entered the Calle de Toledo. In this was the great entrance of the palace of Escalona, lying midway between the young soldier and the Plaza Mayor, or great square. Instead, however, of approaching it, Clifford turned short to the left, and proceeded about two hundred yards up the Street of Segovia. Once more he changed his course, and turning suddenly to his right, entered the Calle de los Cuchilleros.

It has been already mentioned that it was a long, narrow lane, abounding in curves, and having one side occupied by houses, for the most part of a mean character. On the other was a lofty brick wall, the fence of the extensive gardens of the house of Pacheco, and in this was the door by which he was to be admitted. So great was the darkness, that he had some difficulty in discovering it. Perseverance, however, gave him success; and

wrapped in his mantle, he awaited in a dark recess near it, the appointed signal. At length the clock of St. Isidro struck ten. As its last chimes died away, Clifford gave the three raps agreed on, whispered the pass-word through the key-hole, and was admitted.

"It is a cold night for your worship," said José, as he re-locked the door, "but it has one advantage, there will be none in the gardens. So we may proceed without fear of interruption."

The old man turned as he spoke, and led the way to the palace by nearly the same route which had formerly been traversed by Clifford. He passed the fountain, but instead of taking the road to the left which led to the great hall, moved straight forward towards the right wing of the building, in which were the apartments of Donna Teresa. He then mounted the steps which led to the terrace, upon which they opened, and stopped at a glass door.

"This, señor, leads to the corridor, and there you will find my young lady awaiting you. I will myself return to the gate, that I may be ready to re-open it when you leave the garden."

With the words, his guide retired, and

Clifford was left alone. He tapped at the door. It was immediately opened by Therese, and the lovers were in each other's arms.

"Hush," said she, in an agitated tone, as she disengaged herself from his embrace, "there is danger here. Have you seen any one since you entered?"

"None, love, but José."

"Yet there are some abroad to-night who have no right to be near my grandfather's house, or they would not have approached it in disguise. It was about an hour ago—do not laugh, Charles—but though I knew it was impossible for you to be here, I could not help watching for you, when all at once I heard a man's step upon the terrace. At first I fancied it was you, for I thought that you and José might have mistaken the hour. Fortunately, however, I did not stir, for at that moment a tall figure wrapped in a mantle passed by. Great as my terror was, I had the curiosity to open the door gently, and watch him. I saw the figure stop opposite Donna Violante's private sitting-room. He—for I am sure that it was a man—rapped, and was admitted, and now I can partly understand by what agency you and my grand-

father—on that fearful night — were surprised in the banqueting-hall. What is to be done ?"

"Nothing at present," said Clifford, gallantly, as he pressed the fair girl's hand to his lips; "nothing but to tell you, Therese, how truly, how passionately I love you !"

"Oh ! Charles, dear Charles, how can you think of these follies at such a moment ?"

"It is the very moment to think of them," said her lover. "Are we not together ?"

"But the danger—"

"Pshaw ! there is none. You say you saw but one man pass, and I have," continued he, pointing to his pistols, "the lives of four at my belt; and besides," added he, with a joyous laugh, "am I not a perfect master of fence, and able to cope with the most accomplished espadero in Madrid ?"

And Therese felt herself reassured, and for a few minutes the lovers abandoned themselves to a relation of their feelings, and those thousand little confidences which so trifling in themselves, are yet so delicious to those who interchange them.

It was only after the first burst of affection

was over that Clifford ventured to inform his companion of the melancholy news of which he was the bearer. They filled her with dismay. From her residence in Madrid, and her necessary acquaintance with court gossip, she had been even more impressed than her lover, with the extent of the Queen's influence, and she had scarcely permitted herself to doubt the success of her interference. To learn then, the little-expected result, to the last degree depressed her, as the failure not only announced present calamity, but was ominous of future evil; for who could be expected to persuade Philip to the dismissal of his minister, when even his wife, who for the most part ruled him like a child, had been unable to effect it? Again and again did Therese make her lover read aloud the short note in which Elizabeth Farnese had acknowledged her ill success, and ambiguous as its terms might be to a general reader, to them its language was distinct enough. It confessed in the writer, and suggested to those who pondered on its words—despair.

There was a long silence. It was broken by Clifford.

"And can you, my love, devise nothing?"

"Nothing," said Therese, as the tears stood in her eyes.

"And has your house, the great house of Pacheco, no friends?"

"Alas! none now; for who in Spain has friends willing or powerful enough to face the anger of its first minister? And yet I am unjust; I have one, but he is a humble one: La Roche, the premier valet of the King.

"Ha!" said Clifford, joyously, "I had forgotten him. He may be a more valuable ally than you think of, and may perchance for me, as for you, do what no grandee in Spain could accomplish—win me an audience of Philip. By to-morrow, I may be able to trace out some plan. So let your taciturn messenger make his appearance regularly during the siesta, at the Calle de la Cabeza, and from day to day I will inform you of my success. But it is late, love, and I must be gone; and now—good-night."

As he spoke, Clifford left the room, and followed by Therese, proceeded in silence to the terrace. They had gained it, and Clifford was about to depart, when all at once a noise was heard on the further end of it, and a bright

stream of light shot across the tesselated pavement of the raised pathway. At the same instant a man's voice was heard in loud tones, mixed occasionally with the notes of a woman's, apparently in entreaty or expostulation.

The lovers stood still in astonishment, and then once more hurriedly sought shelter in the corridor.

It is from Donna Violante's room," whispered Therese. "The man whom I saw enter is probably about to leave. Wait till he be gone."

The expected cavalier did not, however, seem in any hurry to take his departure, for again was his voice heard, followed as before by whisperings and entreaties in a lower tone. Some two or three minutes thus passed, when Clifford lost patience.

"Come," said he, "I must go see who this noisy gentleman is. Nay, love," continued he, as Therese whispered her fears, "there is no danger. We will remain within the shadow of the wall, and without being seen, can soon solve this mystery."

He drew a pistol from his belt, and with a stealthy step moved along the terrace, while

Therese accompanied him, clinging nervously to his left arm. They soon approached the light, and keeping themselves shrouded in the darkness, had the chamber of the duenna and its occupants brought distinctly to their view.

In a large arm-chair, near the table in the centre of the room, sat our worthy friend, Benedict Di Castro. Some half-dozen bottles were upon the table, and the jolly priest seemed to have absorbed their contents, for he was hopelessly drunk, his black gown open, his body bent, his legs stretched out to their extreme length, and his whole face stamped with the expression, by which inebriety in its last stage seeks to counterfeit wisdom. He did not seem, however, as yet to have relinquished his potations, for he held a tumbler firmly in his left hand, while he made a not very successful effort to fill it with his right. Around him flitted his guardian angel of fifty, at one moment endeavouring to wrest the bottle from his grasp, and at another entreating him to be gone while he could yet walk.

"Now, Benedict, my dear Benedict, you must positively have no more liquor—you have had too much already; come now, there is a dear,

good man. See, I have opened for you the window which leads to the terrace; so put down the bottle, Di Castro, and here is your hat."

"It is the Italian priest—the friend of Alberoni," whispered Therese to Clifford.

"*Favete linguis!*" hiccuped out the worthy friend of the Cardinal. "Bah! I thought I was in the Seminario at Parma. Pocas palabras, Donna Violante; hold your tongue, I say. I will not stir a foot. What, leave you! my little butter-pat of a woman—my beauty—my Venus—my angel!" and the holy father winked at the duenna in a manner which was by no means orthodox.

The admiration seemed only to terrify the fair lady, for she exclaimed, in an agitated voice:

"Now do not speak so loud, Father Benedict—do not now, for the love of the Virgin!"

"A fiddlestick for the Virgin! It is you that I am in love with."

"Oh! what words, what dreadful words!" exclaimed the horror-struck duenna.

"Yes, it's true, perfectly true," replied her admirer, with drunken gravity. "You are a thousand times handsomer than that black doll

in the church of Atocha, though they have given her a mantilla of Mechlin lace, and a petticoat of Lyons silk, and a string of pearls round her neck, each of them as big as a plover's egg."

"Oh, por Dios!" muttered his scandalized companion.

"What!" said the irritated ecclesiastic, at what he thought an attempt to dispute his opinion, "do you think that I, Benedict Di Castro, don't know? Have not I seen them a thousand times? Have not I calculated a thousand times that each of them was worth a cask of the best wine in Spain? If I had the wearing of them, I know how they should go!" And fired by the association, the jolly priest struck up, at the top of his voice, "Valdepenas, Valdepenas," a celebrated Spanish drinking-song, whose stanzas were devoted to the praises of the liquor in question.

Donna Violante rushed towards him, and endeavoured to stop his choral efforts by placing one hand upon his mouth, while with the other, after the fashion of her country, she gesticulated violently, exclaiming at intervals:

"Oh, the Virgin! Oh, the saints! Oh, Father Benedict! I shall be ruined, I tell you; you will wake the house!"

"Bah!" said Di Castro, snapping his fingers, and in tones of infinite contempt; "I don't care that for the house. Per Bacco! if it were not that you insisted upon my drinking so much liquor, and that I am slightly overtaken, I could thrash every man in it."

"Oh!" screamed the duenna, thunderstruck at the presumption: "if he heard you, what would the grand chamberlain say?"

"Not much, my love, if you but wait for a week. We are going to take his head off. Julio and I decided upon it last night."

Clifford passed his arm round the waist of his companion, or the poor girl from terror would have fallen to the ground. He, himself, continued to listen eagerly to the conversation.

"Ah, you wretches!" said the soft-hearted duenna, "you ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"What for? for taking off a grandee's head? Pooh! much you know about the matter. In Spain there is nothing gives so much respectability to an administration."

"And would you," sobbed Donna Violante, "would you really wish to bring the old man to so dreadful a fate?"

"Nothing dreadful about it. I will confess him myself; and I can tell you a man is not to be pitied who is confessed *in extremis* by a canon of St. Jago. He dies in the very odour of sanctity—sure of it. And I would not charge him a maravedi for the job: after all the good liquor I have drunk from his cellar, I were a Jew or a heathen even to dream of such a thing."

The duenna seemed little comforted by the prospect of the many advantages which were to attend the dying moments of the grand chamberlain.

"And to think," said she, sobbing, "that you are going to ruin the old man, and that after all the happy days which I have spent in this house, I shall be obliged to leave it."

"Pooh! pooh! don't vex yourself about that, my beauty," said her companion, with a hiccup. "I will give you better quarters. You shall be my housekeeper. Are you properly conscious of the honour? I doubt it. You think me only a canon of St. Jago.

Nothing of the sort. I am confessor elect to his Catholic Majesty Philip V., King of Spain and the Indies." And the worthy ecclesiastic, in order to do justice by his attitude to his new honours, attempted to raise himself in his chair; but the effort was too much for him, and the head once more sunk down upon his shoulder.

"Oh, Benedict! you are very drunk indeed, when you talk such nonsense," said the duenna, losing her temper at what she thought was an attempt to impose upon her. "You know Father D'Aubenton is the confessor."

"Pooh! pooh! you speak in ignorance, woman. That rogue of a Jesuit is to be turned off next week, and I am to be put in his place —Julio insists on it. He says I am the only man in Spain fit for the office."

The duenna shook her head in contemptuous incredulity. The priest saw the gesture, and it roused him to fury.

"What! you doubt!" said he. "I begin to suspect, Donna Violante, that you are nothing better than a heathen; for you do not believe: and what is a heathen but an unbeliever? But

I will convert you. Bah! with the aid of the Holy Office, that is nothing. I will do more: I will convince you—I will put you to shame. I will show you the *litera scripta*—you shall have the very text for it."

He drew, as he spoke, from the inside of his vest, though with some difficulty, a large, greasy pocket-book, from the interior of which he took a letter.

"Read that," said he, with an air of great dignity, "read that, woman, and be convinced. Ay, and read it aloud, too; for it does my ears good to hear it."

The duenna complied — probably moved, partly by curiosity, and partly by a wish not to irritate further her unmanageable companion —and read as follows:

"'My dear Benedict,'

"That's me," hiccuped the priest.

"'I must insist on your becoming father confessor to the King. On the 8th the affair of the grand chamberlain will be over. On the evening of that day, I will dismiss D'Aubenton, and thus get quit of both my enemies

at once. On the 8th, therefore, you will be installed in your new office. So be ready and be sober.

"'Yours affectionately,

"'JULIO.'"

"Well, what do you think of that?" said Di Castro, as he took the letter, and replaced it in the pocket-book. "I suppose you know who Julio is? It's Alberoni—it's the Cardinal—it's the prime minister of Spain—it's my friend. A great man! only subject occasionally to unjust suspicions, and having the odd fancy that all his acquaintance have a disposition to intemperance. But who is perfect?" said he, nodding his head with drunken gravity. "Alas! alas! Donna Violante! '*Non cuivis contigit adire Corinthum*'—I forget the chapter of the Breviary. I sometimes fancy that even I have my weaknesses, my follies, my—" But the sentence was never destined to be completed; for the liquor and the long oration which he had just uttered had produced their effect. The priest's eyes closed, his head fell back on the chair, and the pocket-book containing the precious letter dropped upon the ground. As

for the poor duenna, she seemed to have fairly lost her senses; for terrified at the thought of Di Castro being found in her room, and unable to devise any means of getting quit of him, she hurried wildly round the apartment, wringing her hands convulsively, and calling for aid upon every saint in the calendar.

The scene which we have described had been watched with eager interest by Clifford and Therese. The words uttered by the priest with reference to the Duke of Escalona had for the moment terrified his grandchild. By degrees, however, she recovered her self-possession and awaited with breathless curiosity the result of the *tête-à-tête*. The fall of the pocket-book had not escaped the keen eyes of Clifford. In a moment he had pondered, decided, and acted.

"Therese, my love," whispered he, "upon the possession of that pocket-book depends your grandfather's life. Leave me with the speed of light. Re-enter the corridor, and approach the door which leads to it from this room. Call loudly for the duenna; she will instantly, from the fear of your entering her apartment, obey your summons. In the meantime, in her absence, I will enter from the window, and carry

off the precious pocket-book from this sleeping drunkard. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. But how shall I know of your success?"

"Give me your mantilla. If all goes well, you will find it on the terrace at the entrance of the corridor."

There was a hurried embrace—the lips touched—the mantilla was left in her lover's hand—and the young girl was gone. Clifford once more turned his eager eyes towards the priest and Donna Violante. The former still slept heavily; the latter continued to move with the air of a bacchante round the room. All at once she started, her face became pale with horror, and she clasped her hands more wildly than before.

"Oh! Holy Mother!" exclaimed she; "there is Donna Teresa's voice, and she is calling me. If she enter here I am lost. I must prevent her," and with a glance of intense anger and scorn at her unconscious companion, she hurried from the chamber.

Half an hour had elapsed, and Therese once more stepped upon the terrace. There was no figure to intercept the light, but by the door of

the corridor lay the mantilla. She grasped it eagerly, and tears of joy streamed down her cheeks, for there was something which whispered to her heart that her grandfather's life was saved.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PASS-WORD OF ST. IGNACIO.

CLIFFORD had obtained the precious pocket-book. He had had no difficulty in securing it. The jolly canon of St. Jago was too much exhausted with his oratory and his liquor to be conscious of the attempt on his property, and the intruder, with the papers in his possession, made his way to the garden-gate. There José was at his post, and having, through the medium of his key, gained the lane, he returned to the Calle de la Cabeza. The hour was late, but he was too agitated to sleep, and he spent the greater part of the night sunk in the recesses of his chair, and meditating upon the best mode of employing a prize so valuable.

That the exhibition of it, to the eyes of D'Aubenton, would destroy the friendship between him and the Cardinal, Clifford did not doubt; but the difficulty was to find the means of placing the important document in the hands of the King's confessor. Something more even was necessary. To produce disunion was not sufficient. What was required was to make that disunion tend to the dismissal of the prime minister by connecting the animosity of the Jesuit with his interests.

It was notorious that a cardinal's hat was the great object of D'Aubenton's ambition. Could this be obtained only through the medium of Alberoni, the father confessor might possibly smother his resentment, lest it might be a bar to the fulfilment of his hopes of the purple; but if his ambition could be gratified by other agency, there was little doubt that he would do his best to effect the ruin of a man convicted of the double crime of having deceived him, and of being no longer able to aid his rise.

The road to success with the confessor of the King was then plain enough. His vindictive spirit was to be roused by the production of Alberoni's letter to Di Castro, and his interested

nature tempted by the promise of a cardinal's hat from the Duke of Orleans. Yet for all this an interview was necessary. A mere abstract statement of the two facts—the treachery of the prime minister, and the favourable feeling of the Regent of France towards the confessor, however well authenticated either might be—was not sufficient. Human minds are like iron: a single blow produces but little impression. It is by the continuous application of the external agency that the metal becomes heated, and it was only by a personal conference, that the mind of the Jesuit could be welded to the purposes of the young diplomatist, and a pledge won from him of his co-operation. How was such a conference to be obtained?

On this, Clifford pondered long and anxiously. At length his ideas took a definite shape. On the following day there was to be a Funcion, or religious procession, in which, as a matter of course, D'Aubenton would play his part, and at this, Clifford hoped it might be possible to approach him. The effort was at least worth making, nor did it appear either difficult or dangerous. A momentary approximation was all that was necessary. The con-

fessor of the King was in the habit of receiving petitions, and the mere circumstance of a person thrusting a paper into his hand was not likely to be remarked, the more especially as the darkness would lend its aid; for the procession did not move till four in the afternoon, and would not approach the convent until sundown.

The attempt being thus decided on, as it might be necessary to inform Therese of its success or its failure, instructions were given to José, who had appeared at the usual hour, to be in waiting at the garden-gate in the Calle de los Cuchilleros at ten o'clock. This done, Clifford set about preparing for his enterprise.

He had obtained from Perez the secret of the gipsy dye, and been taught how to use it. This he now applied, and dressed in the costume of a citizen of Madrid, wrapped in his large cloak and attended by his host, whose knowledge of court notorieties was necessary to point out the object of his search, he left his quarters. In the event of his being fortunate enough to get near the confessor, he had prepared a packet which he intended to place in his hand.

In the meantime, the hours passed on, and the procession commenced its march. Night had fallen, but the darkness added only to the brilliancy of the scene. The whole line of buildings from the Palace to the Plaza Mayor, and from the Plaza Mayor to the end of the street of Atocha, was decorated in the gayest fashion; the exterior of the houses being entirely covered with rich carpets. The windows were illuminated by wax tapers, and numerous others of immense size blazed in the balconies. These were crowded with all the rank and beauty of Madrid, each lady being in her richest dress, and covered with diamonds and jewellery.

Below moved the actors in the pageant. The road was cleared by a regiment of guards. Behind, at intervals, came alternate bodies of troops and friars. With these were intermingled deputations from the clergy of every parish of the capital, having, in the midst of them, stages carried upon men's shoulders, and covered above with groups of figures, as large as life, representing persons in Scripture history. Towards the centre, and in the place of honour, walked the King himself, with the most distin-

guished persons of the Court, all bearing wax-tapers in their hands; and for four hours did the long file of human beings pass on.

The building itself, the destination of the marshalled multitude, was not unworthy of the splendour affected by its intended inmates.

In 1719, the church of Atocha, on occasions when a Funcion or religious ceremony was to be represented within its walls, was, to the inhabitants of Madrid, precisely what the opera-house is to the fashionable denizens of the modern capitals of Europe. The ecclesiastical theatre, like its lay sister, had its music and dancing, its scenery, machinery, dresses, and decorations. The nave and aisle of the sacred edifice were decorated with orange-trees, pomegranates, jessamines, and myrtles of great height, which grew in buckets of silver, and now extended in long avenues, and now described a circle round some marble fountain.

Above, and on every side, were cages of gold wire, filled with nightingales, linnets, and canaries; while the whole was illuminated by a thousand wax-tapers of immense size, whose

light flashed on jewellery, and gold plate, and the rich uniforms of the military, or lost itself in the gloom of the vaulted roof. In front of the great altar, and up to the very pronouncing of the Benediction, danced beautiful boys with castanets in their hands; their movements varied at intervals by the more solemn but not less carefully-studied evolutions of the officiating priesthood.

It was a strange scene, that mixture of men of the gown and of the sword—of the blasts of trumpets, and the voices of choristers, and the click of castanets, and the sound of falling water—of Pagan rites and Christian ceremonial —of the worship of the Phœnician goddess Astarte and the Catholic divinity the negro Virgin of Atocha, which has no parallel in modern times, and which, but for the detailed accounts of contemporary writers, would have been believed, at a period so little distant from our own, as altogether incredible.

Clifford did not join the procession, but hurried on to the church itself, in the hope that the pressure of the crowd might give him an excuse for communicating with the confessor— a thing the more simple as the Spanish court,

according to the habit of the country, was for the most part little surrounded by guards, and easy of approach. But the anticipations of the envoy were not destined to be realized. It had become the policy of Alberoni to impress upon the King's mind suspicion of all around him; and on the present occasion, as if in anticipation of treachery or violence, Philip and his attendants, instead of mixing with the people, were jealously guarded by a strong body of armed men, who interposed an impenetrable barrier between the royal *cortège* and the spectators.

Clifford had thus nothing for it but to wait patiently till the conclusion of the ceremony gave him an opportunity of leaving the church. It was late ere he was able to accomplish this, and instead of returning home, he bent his steps towards the Calle de los Cuchilleros, and awaited patiently in the neighbourhood of the garden-gate the hour of ten. At the appointed time José was at his post. Clifford entered, and in another minute the lovers were once more together.

To Therese, Clifford detailed his disappointment, and an anxious consultation was held as

to the best method of effecting the delivery of the important letter. Many were the plans proposed, only to be rejected ; and as each newly-created scheme fell to pieces before their eyes, their spirits became more depressed, for it was already the second of the month, and in four days more would arrive the fatal hour fixed for the trial, or, in other words, the condemnation of the grand chamberlain. Clifford spoke at length :

"Yes, love," said he, "I have failed in delivering the letter to the Jesuit, and yet in that letter is our only chance of safety. When I questioned you of the friends of the house of Pacheco, you said there was one still remaining, and that was La Roche, the premier valet-de-chambre of the King. It occurs to me that he might do something to aid us in our present emergency. He must, from his position, have paramount influence over the domestics of the palace, and it is probable that he could contrive to have the letter delivered to D'Aubenton. It is no great favour to ask of him, if, indeed, he feel the gratitude to your family which he so loudly expresses. You must send for him, love, to-morrow, and get him to undertake the

task, for I see no other way in which we can accomplish it."

Therese assented, and received the precious packet, though with no confidence in its efficacy. Scotti had refused to aid them; Elizabeth Farnese had attempted it, and failed. The confessor was now their only remaining hope, yet every hour proved the difficulty of summoning him to an interview; and it was by no means certain, even in the event of his granting it, if he would involve himself in hostilities with a man so unscrupulous and determined as Alberoni. Such were the doubts, shadowing out a dark future, which pressed heavily on their minds, and made tears stream down the cheeks of Therese. Clifford did his best to kiss them away, but she would not be comforted; and the representative of Lord Stanhope, with a heavy heart, departed to his home.

The sorrow, however, of the heiress of the grand chamberlain, deep as it was, did not paralyze her. She had all the energy of her countrywomen. The dames of the north have much passive endurance. They bear misfortune, and bear it well. Those of the south do more, they struggle against it and act. On

the following morning La Roche was summoned to the palace of Escalona. He came, as before, at mid-day, and Therese in a few words expressed to him her wishes. She would have added some explanations of the contents of the missive intended for the confessor, but La Roche refused to listen to them.

"No, no, my dear young lady," said he. "I know nothing of what is contained in this packet, and wish to know nothing; and if you have any ulterior object in its delivery, I pray of you to keep it in your own breast. The premier valet of Philip V. is entitled to transmit a letter to the confessor of his Majesty, but he is not entitled to know of or aid any plans which may have a political result."

"But the packet, Monsieur la Roche, is of the last importance. How will you transmit it to Father D'Aubenton? How will you be certain that it does not fall into wrong hands?"

"That now, Mademoiselle Therese," said the premier valet, with a smile, "is one of my secrets. The means I will not tell; but be assured of this, that ere many hours are over, your letter will be in the hands of the confessor. But I must now bid you adieu, for his Majesty

is restless of late, and I dare not be long absent."

And La Roche made his bow and left the room.

"That girl," muttered he to himself, as he slowly paced his way towards the palace, "is exposing me to greater danger than she dreams of; and yet, poor thing! who can blame her? Her grandfather's life is on the cards, and for her mother's sake I must help her to play them. But how to get quit of this packet without putting myself into the power of that rogue of a Jesuit, I know not. To deliver it myself would but awaken inquiry; to entrust it to one of the domestics, half of whom, to my knowledge, are in the pay of the Cardinal, would be to risk its safety. Ha! now I think of it. D'Aubenton keeps the cabinet that opens from his bedroom constantly locked. It is there he stores up his private papers, and there he has the reputation of retiring to study before he goes to rest. I know how to enter it. The rooms which contain the King's wardrobe adjoin, and the Jesuit little suspects that this alcazar of the Moors abounds in secret stair-cases and sliding panels, and that, prowling about the

old den, I have chanced to find one which gives access to his sanctum. By it will I introduce the letter. Sooner or later he must see it, and one advantage of the plan is, that it can fall into no other hands but his own."

It was about ten o'clock on the same evening that D'Aubenton left the Queen's drawing-room. He had formed part of the royal circle, at which also Alberoni and the ambassador of Parma had been present. The Jesuit entered his bedroom, and removing the black robe of his order, supplied its place with a dressing-gown, which seemed to be worn in hours of study or labour, for its sleeves exhibited no unfrequent stains of ink.

"I am weary," muttered he to himself; "and yet I know not how it is, I feel as if I could not sleep. Alberoni was scarcely so courteous to-night as usual, and his sycophant Scotti, who ever models himself on the manner of the minister, positively rude. It is not worth vexing myself about; and yet I hear nothing further from him of my cardinal's hat. Let me

see what says the last note from Fernando Duran. The Prime Minister of Spain little dreams that his right-hand man, the Marquis of Tolosa, reveals every secret of his office to the confessor of the King.

As he spoke, he drew from the pocket of an inner vest a key of curious workmanship, and applied it to the lock of a door which opened from the bed-chamber. It admitted him to a room of moderate size, wainscoted with oak, and having its alternate panels filled with staring portraits, the size of life, of grim old warriors. Two or three ebony cabinets occupied the intervals between the pictures, while in the centre was a table covered with a small Turkey carpet. D'Aubenton proceeded to one of the escritoires, and unlocking it, drew from a secret recess in the interior a bundle of labelled letters. This done, he approached the table, and placing on it his lamp, was about to seat himself, when all at once his eye was attracted by a sealed packet lying on the desk which contained his writing-materials. It was superscribed, "*Vicit Leo ex tribu Judæ.*" The priest let the bundle of papers in his hand fall to the

ground, and seized eagerly the missive, exclaiming:

"Ha! the pass-word of St. Ignacio! How comes this here? and what are its contents?"

He tore the envelope open as he spoke, and with an anxious eye examined the missives within. They consisted of two letters, one of which bore, on its exterior, the same Latin motto as the envelope, together with a mark in the corner, and to this the Jesuit immediately addressed himself. It was written in cypher, but that to the practised eye of the father confessor, offered no obstacle.

"A letter from the General himself," said he. "It tells nothing; yet the matter must be of rare importance, for it is no trifle which would induce that proud brute, Le Tournemine, to take the pen in his own hand. And he refers me to the bearer for an explanation of his wishes. Mysterious enough," continued the priest, "but let us see what says the agent," and he eagerly turned to the paper which formed the second portion of the contents of the enclosure. It contained the following words:

"The bearer requests of Father D'Aubenton the favour of an interview at twelve o'clock on the night of the third of the present month, by the fountain in the centre of the Plaza de Cebada. Should it not be convenient for the reverend father to give the meeting upon the third, the bearer will await him on the spot designated, at the same hour, on the nights of the fourth and the fifth."

"Pleasant," muttered D'Aubenton to himself, as he laid down the papers. "Pleasant, I say, to be summoned forth to a conference at such an hour, and on such a night as this. Yet go I must, for who can tell what may not be lost by twenty-four hours delay? But I am too well known in Madrid to risk hearing the fellow's message in the Haymarket. I must take him to the College of the Jesuits, and ere I make my way to the Plaza de Cebada, will send orders to get my private room ready; for there must be something in the wind, or the General would not have thought it worth his while to take a part in the mystery."

As he spoke, D'Aubenton once more entered

his sleeping-room, and resumed his cassock. Instead, however, of his usual long, shovel hat, he took from a closet a broad-brimmed sombrero, and large mantle, similar to those worn by the citizens of Madrid; and having donned both with the air of one familiar with their use, hastily left the palace.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COLLEGE OF THE JESUITS.

It was midnight, and the Plaza de Cebada was deserted. Inhabited chiefly by those classes who obtain their bread by their daily toil, there was but little disposition on the part of its residents to spend their time abroad after sun-down, and the Haymarket was in itself too unfashionable a locality to attract those who, during the night, formed the locomotive part of the population—the higher classes of the community. As Clifford then approached the rendezvous, there was nothing to interrupt his progress, and he took his place by the side of the large fountain in the centre of the square. A quarter of an hour had elapsed, and still no

one made his appearance. At length, he heard steps approaching, and a figure wrapped in a mantle became visible in the darkness. The new-comer paced deliberately twice round the fountain, bending on Clifford as he passed, a pair of clear, dark eyes, whose bright glance showed itself even in the night. As he terminated his second round, he stopped suddenly, and addressed him.

"You watch late, caballero," said he. "Wait you for any one?"

"Yes; for a friend."

"Whence comes he?"

"From the old house in Guipuscoa."

"Señor," said the new-comer, "you have the countersign, but this place is too public for our conference, and we may be disturbed. Do me the favour to follow me."

The speaker moved off at a rapid pace, closely followed by Clifford. After threading several streets, they found themselves in front of a large conventual-looking building, but the man in the mantle, instead of approaching the great gate, turned aside into a bye-lane which flanked it, and stopped at a low, modest-looking door, which apparently led into one of the wings

of the gloomy edifice. He tapped at the wicket, and it was immediately opened by a lay brother, in the habit of the Order of Jesus. The janitor bowed with deep respect to the new arrival.

"You got my orders, Francesco?"

"I did, your reverence. Everything is prepared."

The muffled stranger entered; and making a sign to Clifford to follow him, turned to the right along a narrow passage, and entered a room at the end of it. It was low, of moderate size and wainscoted, and had its walls ornamented by one or two pictures of saints from the hands of Spanish artists. The furniture was to the last degree plain, yet the room presented a comfortable appearance; for the floor was carpeted, a large fire burned on the hearth, and two wax-tapers stood upon the table in the centre.

The windows were veiled with hangings of dark brown cloth, and it was impossible to ascertain in what direction they looked, but from the perfect stillness which reigned without, probably on the garden of the monastery. Everything, in short, seemed to intimate that the apartment had been selected for its privacy,

for Clifford remarked that the entrance to it from the passage had double doors, both of which were in turns carefully closed by his guide.

As soon as they were alone, the man in the mantle threw it aside, and invited Clifford to follow his example. The injunction was immediately complied with, and D'Aubenton and his companion stood face to face. With the appearance of the former, the envoy was already familiar. The father confessor had been pointed out to him in the church of Atocha, and he had studied carefully his person and features—a scrutiny the less necessary as he had already, by the British ambassador and Dubois, been made acquainted with the character of the Jesuit—his vaulting ambition, his unscrupulous nature, his vindictiveness, his sycophancy to his superiors, his arrogance to those of whom he believed himself independent.

Of Clifford, on the contrary, the confessor was entirely ignorant. He was, of course, aware that he was the bearer of a letter from Father le Tournemine, the General of the Jesuits, the private marks on which signified

that he was a man to be trusted; but beyond this he knew nothing. Nor rigid as was the discipline of his fraternity, was he disposed to give more obedience to the mandate of his superior than he found convenient. Keen supporter as he was of the interests of the disciples of Loyola, there was one to whose cause he had vowed even a more implicit devotion, and that was himself.

Whatever were the claims of his order, and however ready he might be to advance them in any circumstances with which he was personally unconnected, they were always held as subordinate to his own; and thus he was prepared to receive, with a suspicion which was alike the result of his conventual education and his own nature, the advances of an emissary, whose personal character and whose objects were both as yet a mystery. It was therefore with a keen eye that he surveyed his new acquaintance, as if he would have read in the features of the young soldier, what reasons there might be for trusting him if honest, or for baffling him if otherwise.

The scrutiny was thus long and careful, yet it gathered little. The expression of Clifford

was that of a bold man, but beyond that, it told nothing. Ability or the absence of it were alike veiled beneath that disguise, of all others most difficult to penetrate—a smile. The Jesuit had no alternative, therefore, but to commence the conference, and trust to the details it might develop for grounds upon which to rest an opinion as to the future.

"Señor caballero," said he, in those quiet insinuating tones which became him so well, "I presume it was from you that I received a letter?"

Clifford bowed.

"It had inscribed upon it five words?"

"Vicit Leo ex tribu Judæ."

"Precisely. They are words that intimate that—"

"That the General of the Order had a message to deliver to one of his most distinguished brethren, and bespoke his confidence in the messenger."

"I understand," said D'Aubenton, with a slight bow. "Father—" continued he; and again he paused.

"Father le Tournemine takes a tender interest in the confessor of King Philip."

"I doubt it not," said D'Aubenton, in a meek tone. "Thanks be to Heaven! such affection is entertained by all the disciples of Loyola for their brethren. And yet," added he, "gratifying as must be the knowledge of such sympathies, I can scarcely believe that the señor caballero has come all the way from Paris merely to apprise me of them."

"The reverend father is right. The General not only feels the affection, but would prove it."

"And you are here for the purpose of offering the proof?"

The envoy bowed.

"Will you condescend to explain to me the benignant intentions of my superior?"

"Father le Tournemine," said Clifford, "has long been aware of the lustre conferred on the disciples of Loyola by counting you among the number of their members."

"How amiable!" lisped the Jesuit. "How flattering of Father le Tournemine!"

"The General had hoped that his distinguished brother had long ere this been elevated to the purple, the more especially as he had understood that the all-powerful Cardinal-

minister had pledged himself to the procuring of it!"

There was a pause, as if an affirmation or negative had been expected, but neither was made. The Jesuit merely smiled, and his companion continued:

"The merits of your reverence having been thus strangely overlooked, Father le Tournemine has felt it his duty, as head of the Order, to place you in the lofty position to which your services so justly entitle you. He accordingly suggested to his Royal Highness the Duke of Orleans to demand of his Holiness a place for you in the Sacred College."

D'Aubenton gave a slight start. It was the first time he had shown anything like interest in the conversation. The feeling, however, whatever it was, was instantly subdued, and in a voice as unimpassioned as before he replied:

"And what said the Regent?"

"That he would have the greatest possible pleasure in making the application."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. Nay, more, his Royal Highness added, that considering the full and entire

amity which at the present moment subsists between himself and the Holy See, he did not doubt that the request would be immediately successful."

A flush came over D'Aubenton's cheek, and for a while not a word was uttered. It was possible that he expected Clifford to continue the conversation, but on finding him preserve an obstinate silence, he was compelled to take up the ball in his turn.

"It is a high honour," said he, "for one of the house of Bourbon, to concern himself about a simple priest; and yet, to believe public report, the Regent never acts but from motives of interest. A cardinal's hat is a princely gift. Is it possible that he expects at my hands any favour in return?"

"What could he seek of a churchman, save to promote Christian charity and brotherly love?"

"Undeniable virtues both," said the Jesuit, with a sneer; "but would you condescend to inform me as to the precise mode in which I am expected to give them my support?"

"That it is my province to explain. The King of Spain is a near kinsman of the King of

France and of the Regent, and yet, notwithstanding their mutual affection and the ties of blood, there has been almost constant war between them."

D'Aubenton gave a groan.

"It is a lamentable fact," said he; "one never sufficiently to be reprobated by the ministers of religion."

"I am happy in the concurrence of your reverence. That war is the act of an evil-minded man, who has laboured unceasingly to excite hostility to Louis XV. and the Duke of Orleans."

Once more the Jesuit groaned aloud.

"Under these circumstances, the Regent felt he could not do a greater kindness to one so distinguished for his piety as the confessor of the King of Spain, than to give him an opportunity of removing the cause of such unchristianlike squabbles."

"And who," said the Jesuit, quietly, "is the man you speak of?"

"The Cardinal-minister."

"There is a Cardinal-minister in France as well as in Spain. Which mean you?"

"Alberoni."

The priest was silent. To all appearance he was meditating upon the religious duties thus recommended to his notice. In fact, he was calculating whether at Rome, the interest of Alberoni or the Regent were the greatest. He came to the conclusion that the Spanish minister was the stronger man.

"I cannot," said he, at length, "sufficiently express my gratitude for the favour offered me by the Duke of Orleans."

"Then you accept it?" said Clifford, eagerly.

"No, I refuse it."

Clifford looked astonished.

"Is it possible," continued he, "that you are content to bury all your talents in obscurity, and waste, in a private station, energies which should raise you to the purple, or even to the triple crown?"

"Alas! my friend," replied the priest, "energies and abilities I have none; you greatly overrate my poor qualities. My present station is a modest one, and suits me; but if ever I should make up my mind to forsake the calm happiness and repose which it offers, I have determined that I will be indebted for my new honours to the hand of friendship."

"And may I ask the name of the friend who is so powerful?"

"Alberoni."

"Alberoni!" said Clifford in astonishment. "Why, but now, you reprobated his conduct."

"Pardon me, my son, I applied the term to the unholy war between France and Spain."

"But you agreed with me in thinking the Cardinal was the cause of it."

"Pardon me again, my son. I agreed with you in thinking that he must be an evil-minded man who would excite hostility to princes so amiable as Louis XV. and the Duke of Orleans."

"And yet you yourself have suffered from the arts of the Italian. To you he made a promise, and you, like others, has he deceived."

"Once more, my young friend, you are in error. He did not forget the kind intention—he only delayed it."

"And will your reverence permit me to ask—for I must report to his Royal Highness the Regent, the result of this conference—has he again renewed the promise?"

D'Aubenton nodded.

"Of late?"

Again D'Aubenton gave a sign of assent.

"And you will trust him once more? Forgive me for saying so, it is madness."

"Alas! alas! it is thus that the children of darkness speak of what they know not. They cannot understand the holy bonds which bind together, in love and confidence, those who have devoted themselves to the duties of religion."

Clifford shook his head.

"I see how it is, my young friend," said the Jesuit, compassionately, "you are of the world, and judge like a worldling. Well, for once, I will endeavour to forget my sacred calling and the feelings which it generates, and speak to you as one of yourselves. Why came you hither?"

Clifford coloured, but he said nothing.

"I will tell you. Alberoni is a thorn in the side of the Duke of Orleans. To secure his possession of the regency he would have him displaced, and knowing well my intimacy with the King, would use it for effecting his purpose. Is it not so?"

Clifford was still silent.

"I am right, then. It is to purchase that influence he offers a cardinal's hat. The splendour of the bribe is evidence of the power of him who is asked to accept it."

He paused as if expecting a reply, but none was made.

"You answer not. It matters little; I repeat what I said. The promised favours of the Regent only prove that he believes that it is in my power to change the government."

"On that point," said Clifford, eagerly, "I am happy to be able to speak frankly. No one doubts, nor is his Royal Highness ignorant, that upon the support or hostility of the director of the royal conscience depends the fate of the prime minister of Spain."

"Yes, my friend," said D'Aubenton, gratified in spite of himself at the acknowledgment of his influence, "I have the power. It is the consequence of my office. And now you see why, supposing I squared my conduct by worldly motives, I need have no fear of Alberoni's not keeping his pledge."

"Because you are father confessor?"

"Because I am father confessor."

"But if—pardon the frankness of a novice—

you were not the director of the King's conscience, would you have the same confidence in the promises of the Cardinal?"

D'Aubenton, in spite of his triple mail of assurance, coloured and looked embarrassed.

"My dear friend," said he at length, "you speak of impossibilities."

"In what?"

"In supposing me not father confessor."

"Yet such a thing has been. Forgive me for the painful reminiscence, but you have been displaced once already."

"True," said the Jesuit, colouring with vexation; "but that was in the time of Louis XIV. Philip held his crown by the aid of his grandfather, and could not refuse obeying him."

"Still an event which has happened might happen again."

"I repeat, impossible."

"But supposing the possibility, would you have the same confidence in the promises of the Cardinal?"

Disciplined as the Jesuit's features were, they could not disguise from the quick eye of the envoy a shade of anxiety.

"My dear friend," said he, in a coaxing

tone, "you ask the question as if you had a meaning."

"Allow me, your reverence, to answer one question by another. Supposing you found it was the intention of the Cardinal to deprive you of the confessorship, what would be your inference?"

The priest drew himself up haughtily as if he had received an insult.

"Señor caballero," said he, "it is unnecessary to waste our time in vain imaginings. We had better terminate the conference." And he moved towards his mantle.

"Pardon me," said the envoy, placing his back against the door, "if I detain your reverence a few minutes even against your will. I do assure you, on the honour of a gentleman, that I ask not the question out of mere curiosity. I repeat it then. If you discovered that Alberoni had decided on depriving you of the direction of the King's conscience, on whose promises would you place the most implicit reliance—on those of the Regent or the Cardinal?"

The Jesuit paced up and down the room for

some minutes, apparently uncertain what to say or do. Extravagant as the idea first suggested by Clifford appeared to him, there was something in the manner and the obstinacy with which it had been renewed that, in spite of himself, filled him with alarm, and the working of the muscles of his face, notwithstanding his best efforts at control, revealed to the keen eyes watching him the struggle within. For some minutes he continued to pace the room; suddenly he stopped in front of Clifford and again addressed him; but it was not in the silky tone which he had hitherto affected, but in the voice and the manner of a man of the world.

"Young Sir," said he, "you have been sent on a difficult and a dangerous enterprize; and the difficulty and danger of the mission are the best assurance of the discretion of him who has been entrusted with it. You ask me for my private thoughts; but confidence demands confidence, and you must lead the way. By your language, one would hold you to be as true a Castilian as ever was born at Toledo; yet something whispers to me that you are no

Spaniard. Are you not the caballero who was arrested the other day at the house of the grand chamberlain?"

Clifford nodded.

"You supped that night with the Cardinal, were sent to Segovia, and made your escape three days bygone?"

The envoy laughed outright.

"Your reverence," said he, "has told me all my history."

"Not all," said the Jesuit, with a malicious smile, "but enough to show you that I have my secret police as well as Alberoni. And now," continued he, "as you have answered my question, I will answer yours. Did I believe for a moment that Alberoni dreamt of depriving me of my office, I would hold the intention as evidence of his hostility, and devote myself heart and soul to the wishes of the Regent. And I speak this the more frankly as I cannot deem the Parmesan mad enough for such folly."

Clifford smiled.

"Does your reverence know the hand-writing of the Cardinal?"

"Well."

"Did you ever hear of a certain priest called Benedict Di Castro?"

"The drunken canon of St. Jago, who spends half his time in the wine-shops?"

"Speak more respectfully of your successor," said Clifford, "and acknowledge the mandate of his master." And he handed to the Jesuit, as he spoke, the letter which had been exhibited so triumphantly to the eyes of Donna Violante.

D'Aubenton snatched it from his fingers and read it with trembling eagerness.

"Where got you this, young man?" cried he, in a voice of thunder.

Clifford detailed the scene at the Palace of Escalona: the drunkenness of the priest, the doubts of the duenna, the vainglorious boasting, and its consequences.

"And now," added he, "does your reverence still doubt?"

"Doubt!" repeated D'Aubenton, as he crushed the paper in his hands, and with a face convulsed with passion, paced the room with rapid steps. "I doubt no longer. Madman! fool! idiot! that I was ever to believe—to suppose for a moment that there could be true faith in

an Italian !—to dream that he who deceived me once would not deceive me again ! And I was to have been his tool, his dupe, his bauble ! to be put off, or kept on, as suited his whim ; and all, that in the end I might resign my place to a drunken vagabond—the parasite of the parasite of Vendôme. No, no, Julio Alberoni," continued he, stopping suddenly and clenching his hand, as if he were addressing personally the object of his thoughts, "I warned you if you sought to deceive me again, the treachery should prove your ruin, and Claude D'Aubenton will keep his word."

Suddenly it appeared as if he recollected that there was present a spectator of his violence, for all at once, as if by the exertion of some strong internal power, his manner became calm, his face resumed its ordinary expression, and in cold low tones, which contrasted painfully with the excited violence of the voice which had preceded them, he said :

"Colonel Clifford, I accept the offers of the Regent, and will do my best to second his wishes. It will not be my fault if before a week is over Alberoni be not a fugitive. But it is idle to continue this discussion to-night. Give

me your address, and from time to time I will communicate to you my intentions and their result; and now to bed. There is much to be done, and in such cases there is no such counsellor to a man as his pillow."

And the new-made allies once more resumed their disguise. They parted at the door, and Clifford took his way to the Calle de la Cabeza.

CHAPTER XIV.

A KING AND HIS CONFESSOR.

It was on the morning after the conference narrated in the last chapter, that D'Aubenton, according to the duties of his office, entered the King's chamber. The religious ceremonial in which he had taken a part seemed to have had a beneficial influence upon its royal occupant, for he had, to a certain degree, lost his usual listless melancholy; and instead of being sunk, as for the most part, in the cushions of his easy-chair, he was on foot, and employed in studying, with earnest attention, that master-piece of Titian which has already been alluded to, and which represented, in

the character of Venus, the Princess of Eboli.

A change too had come over the Jesuit, but it was of a less pleasing character. Twelve hours had scarcely passed since his interview with Clifford, and yet they had done upon him the work of years. To think that he, one of the most astute of an order of priesthood, celebrated beyond all others for reading men's characters aright, and judging with singular accuracy of their policy and truthfulness in their professions, should have been gulled by one whom he considered so infinitely his inferior in the mind's more subtle intelligences, was to the proud priest to the last degree galling. The feeling of mortification had been but the antecedent of the feeling of revenge, and he had spent the live-long night in devising plans for making retribution as complete as possible.

He was too much agitated, however, to be able to shape out any plan which satisfied himself as calculated to effect the desired object; and he entered the King's chamber at his customary hour with every idea vague and undecided, except the hope of future vengeance.

To further its attainment, it was clear that the King's humour, for the moment, must be gratified; and it was therefore in a more amiable voice than ordinary that he accosted his royal penitent.

"Allow me, Sire," said he, as he approached Philip and addressed him in his most insinuating tones, "to congratulate your Majesty on the favourable change which has taken place in your health and spirits."

"Yes," said his companion, with a laugh; "I scarcely know why, but it seems as if the Funcion of the church of Atocha had renewed my youth. I feel as I have not felt for years; and the recollections of my boyhood—its hopes, its wishes, its happiness—the old enjoyment of existence when existence was worth enjoying, have each, in turn, come over my memory."

"I guessed as much," said the priest; "and it needs no prophet to discover with whom those hopes, and wishes, and happiness were associated." He looked, as he spoke, on the portrait which had been the subject of the King's studies, and added: "You thought of the Princess of Ursins!"

"You are right, D'Aubenton. I thought of

her who gave me that picture—of Anne de la Trémouille."

"The best, the most devoted of friends; to whose counsel and firmness your Majesty is, in fact, indebted for your throne."

"How charming a creature she was," said Philip, "when I knew her first! How lovely! I doubt," continued he, pointing to the Titian on the wall, "if even she—the *belle des belles*—the wife of Ruy Gomez, were half as beautiful!"

"Yes," continued the confessor, "the princess was about thirty when your Majesty was selected to fill the Spanish throne; and boy as you then were, you must have been a stock, a stone, an anchorite, had you not seen that a more perfect being never walked upon earth. Your Majesty spoke of her beauty, but of mere beauty we churchmen take no note; yet even that, brilliant as it might have been, was forgotten amid the blaze of her thousand fascinations, her grace, her talents, her mind. Ah, Sire, how she loved you!"

"She did—she did!" said Philip, clasping his hands passionately.

"And how she was requited!"

Philip grew pale as death; and, as if from inability to support himself, leant against a chair.

"D'Aubenton!" said he, in a low, faint voice, which had, nevertheless, in it something of reproach.

"Sire?"

"You are cruel," continued the King, in faltering accents.

"In what?" said the Jesuit. "I spoke of a disgraceful outrage—of an act which will to the day of doom, dishonour the name of Alberoni."

"You are right, D'Aubenton," said Philip, speaking hurriedly, as if conscience endeavoured to lull her voice by transferring the guilt to another. "It was not I; it was Alberoni."

"Alberoni, the prime minister of Spain."

There was something like sarcasm in the accents of the priest's voice; for again the King hastened to defend himself.

"Yes—the prime minister of Spain. He is, you know, from Parma—a countryman of the Queen. It is her doing, and not mine."

"Your grandfather of glorious memory was not in the habit of leaving to his wife the selection of his ministers."

"True, true; but our honoured grandame, Maria Teresa, took no interest in state affairs."

"Yet who was better entitled to interfere? She was the sister of a mighty monarch. She was eventually the heiress of a great kingdom. She was her husband's equal."

"True—true—true," said Philip, as if he would have avoided the continuance of the subject; but the confessor was not to be so easily moved from his purpose.

"Whereas your Majesty," said he, "shared your crown with the niece of a paltry Italian prince. She might have been satisfied with the honour of being a Queen, without claiming, besides, the right of ruling a kingdom."

"And yet," said Philip, ever tenacious of respect to Elizabeth Farnese, "the choice was no bad one; for the Cardinal is a great statesman."

"In what, Sire, saving in the greatness of his misfortunes? When he first received the reins of power, he found your Majesty at peace, and he involved you in war with half the dynasties of Europe."

"He conquered Sardinia," said the King, timidly.

"You have lost it."

"He equipped a powerful fleet."

"The English destroyed it at Girgenti."

"He created a rebellion in France."

"Only to see it crushed, and some half-dozen Breton nobles, whom he had seduced from their allegiance, perish on the scaffold."

"Well," said Philip, in a tone which marked his irritation, "events have occasionally gone cross even with the greatest men; but you will acknowledge at least the vastness of his mind—the grandeur of his plans."

"Pardon me, Sire, if I refuse to acknowledge either. The excellence of a tree must be known by its fruit; and I cannot admire plans which not only want success, but appear to bring calamity upon every person connected with them. At his suggestion, the Duke of Ormond equipped a fleet to bear aid to the Jacobites in England. It was dispersed at sea. At his suggestion, Charles XII. of Sweden consented to support their cause; and the result of the unhappy alliance was his assassination at Frederickshall. No, Sire, the Cardinal is unfortunate, and more than unfortunate, for his aid seems to insure positive calamity."

The facts recapitulated by the Jesuit were undeniable, whatever might have been the accuracy of the deduction from them; and they seemed to bring back the shadows, which for the most part rested upon the spirit of Philip, as on that of the King of Israel. Insensibly his manner lost its new-found elation, and his eye its brightness; and with hesitating step, he once more made his way to his chair.

"It is too true, D'Aubenton," said he. "It is but too true! The calamities you have spoken of have followed each other in a manner which would appal the strongest heart. Would to Heaven," muttered he to himself, "I could guess their cause!"

"Your prayers are answered, Sire. I am a priest; and it is given to me, as to Daniel of old, to interpret what is hidden from eyes less holy. The man is evil; and Heaven expresses its anger at his acts by sending misfortune upon those who employ him."

Philip was superstitious, and the idea of divine wrath appalled him.

"And in what," said he, in hesitating accents, "has he sinned?"

"In much. He would send to the scaffold

one of your oldest and most faithful servants, the grand chamberlain."

"Yet the policy, if a harsh, is a sound one. Pacheco is a grandee, and the power of the great nobles has ever been injurious to the state."

"Ha! the axiom smacks of the Cardinal. How proved he that?"

"Tarquin knocked off the heads of the tallest poppies to win Gabii."

"He did well: Gabii was not his own; and he suggested shedding the blood of his enemies. Pardon me for saying that it is your own subjects whom your Majesty is bringing to the block."

"And yet no one doubts Richelieu's talents; and Alberoni averred that Richelieu adopted the same policy."

"Did the Cardinal add that it applied to the king as well as to his subjects? Did he inform your Majesty that if the French nobles were the victims of the minister of Louis XIII., the French monarch was his slave?"

"No, no, no; he said nothing of that."

"Did he inform you, Sire, that it was only by the permission of this Mayor of the Palace,

that the King of France engaged or dismissed a servant? Did he say that the amusements, the expenses, the employments of this king and no king, were all regulated by his minister?—that he fixed even his hunting-days, and only once in nine years permitted him to see his wife?"

"Monstrous!" exclaimed Philip, "monstrous, if it were not incredible."

The King was the most uxorious of men, and the last blow had evidently told.

The Jesuit saw his advantage, and followed it up eagerly.

"Worst of all, your Majesty, he has done his best to break up the ties of family affection, by producing dissension between you and the Regent of France, your cousin, the Duke of Orleans."

"Name him not," said Philip, springing to his feet as if affected by a sudden spasm. "I hate, I detest, I loathe him!"

"It grieves me, Sire, to see in you a spirit so uncharitable. Is this Christianity? Is this religion?"

"It is both, D'Aubenton," continued the King as he approached his confessor, and addressed him in a voice which bespoke the most

intense horror. "You think that my enmity to him is the result of disappointed worldly interest. You are wrong. I am a man, and I confess I love him not, for his long-continued and often-proved enmity. But I detest him, not for that, but because—because—" and the King paused for a minute, and then in accents of horror, whispered in his confessor's ear, "because he is a Jansenist."

"You are misinformed, Sire," said the Jesuit, coldly. "You have been grossly deceived. The Regent is only an atheist."

"Are you sure of that?" said Philip, anxiously.

"Perfectly sure of it."

"Ah!" And the King took a long breath, as if his mind had been relieved of a fearful load.

"You see," said D'Aubenton, "that is quite a different thing."

"Oh, quite different!"

"An atheist, your Majesty, is merely a person who believes nothing. His perdition is assured no doubt. But that is his affair. No one else is the worse for it. But a Jansenist,

Sire—" and the Jesuit looked grave, and shook his head.

The King carefully modelled his demeanour upon that of his spiritual director.

"A Jansenist, Sire, is a very different person. He does more than disbelieve, he acts. An atheist is satisfied with infidelity, and rests. He does the Church no injury. A Jansenist, on the contrary, is her zealous and constant enemy. He disputes her doctrines, denies her traditions, and disclaims her rights and her power."

Once more the Jesuit shook his head, and the royal periwig recommenced its oscillations.

"He rejects," said D'Aubenton, "the celibacy of the clergy."

"Dreadful!"

"He doubts the power of the Church to give absolution."

"Monstrous!"

"He denies the supremacy of the Pope."

"Horrible!" said Philip, clasping his hands, and looking up to Heaven, as if in astonishment, that it could for a moment tolerate such wickedness.

"Your Majesty sees, then, that you have been misinformed."

"Oh, entirely."

"That your cousin is a mere *esprit fort*."

"Nothing more."

"He has to be sure some silly notions, but, notwithstanding, is an excellent man."

"Oh, I do not doubt it. Now that I know that he is not a Jansenist, I can overlook trifles. The duke may have some small weaknesses, but in other respects, I believe, as you say, he is an excellent man."

"And yet between your Majesty and this amiable prince of your house, the Cardinal has ever attempted to sow dissension."

"True—true—true. A constant embroiler. A thorough spirit of evil."

"Your Majesty speaks well," continued the priest. "The whole career of the Cardinal has been one of crime, and it is of your Majesty that Heaven has hitherto exacted the price. Your Majesty knows of his unjust and unnecessary wars, but you scarcely know the impiety by which they have been supported. About eight months ago you sent a large fleet to sea. How was it equipped? You will

scarcely believe it, Sire—at the expense of religion. For his godless ends, the Cardinal, by forced contributions, raised half a million of ducats from the monasteries, and compelled those who devote themselves to prayer, to provide funds for the unholy purposes of war."

"Sacrilege!" gasped forth Philip. "Positive sacrilege!"

"And what was the result? Precisely what might have been expected. The fleet was destroyed by the English off the coast of Sicily."

"True, true," said the King, clasping his hands in despair, "a double dispensation. Vanquished, and by heretics; I see the crime and its punishment."

"There are others of a deeper dye. Your Majesty little suspects it, but I have a tale to disclose to your royal ear which will harrow your feelings. The Cardinal has formed a league with the Turks."

"Incredible! With the followers of the impostor of Mecca? with Mahoun?"

"Yes; with Mahoun. A Catholic king, nay more, *the* Catholic king, leagued in alliance with the oppressors of the Holy City; with those, by fighting against whom, St. Louis, the greatest,

the most pious of your name, won for himself a blessed salvation, and immortality."

The blow was too much for endurance. The royal bigot sunk down in his chair and remained for some time silent, as if paralyzed by the nature of the communication.

"And yet," said he, after a while, "if Alberoni has sinned, it may have been for the advancement of my interests; and though I may not approve, it is scarcely just that I, for whose benefit it was intended, should denounce the act."

"Sire, it is a duty."

"And yet—" began the reluctant monarch.

"Sire," continued D'Aubenton, "it concerns me much to see your Majesty so hardened in evil. But if you will not discharge your duties, I will, at least, discharge mine. We of the priesthood are permitted to grant absolution, but it is only to those who sorrow for their offences. Forgive me, Sire, for saying that where there is no repentance for sin, it is impossible for me to absolve the sinner."

"Oh! father, holy father," said the King, falling upon his knees, "recall those words. Much as I love this man, I would not for him

peril my soul. Recall them, I say, and I will do everything which duty, which religion requires."

"Heaven is merciful," said the Jesuit, "and I am its minister. I will recall them, but on conditions."

"Oh, only name them," said the royal penitent, eagerly, "and I am willing to fulfil them."

"But now—this instant—this very moment."

"I repeat that I am ready."

"It is well." With the words, the priest sat himself down to a table, and wrote some two or three lines upon a sheet of paper near him. When he had finished, he handed it to the King, and said: "Your Majesty will copy that, and authenticate it with your signature."

Philip took the paper, cast his eyes hurriedly over the words scrawled by his confessor, and became deadly pale.

"It is too cruel," said he. "You will not insist on a sacrifice like this?"

"Ha! you hesitate!" said D'Aubenton, in a voice of thunder. "You hesitate! Your professions, then, were false, your repentance a mockery."

The King made no reply. Probably from the agitation of his feelings he was unable to articulate. His very limbs seemed to lose their power, for he staggered to the chair, and sinking down in it, covered his face with his hands.

With a keen eye the Jesuit watched the movements of his penitent. For a moment his features wore the expression of intense contempt. Gradually they assumed a loftier character.

"Sinful man!" said he, in a tone of admonition, "has it come to this? You have promised, and have broken your promise. You have spoken of repentance, but have felt it not. You have lied not unto me, but unto God; and thus I, His minister, pronounce your doom."

He raised his arms aloft as he spoke, and drew up his person to his full height, in the attitude of one about to pronounce a malediction. But the words were never permitted to leave his lips, for Philip started to his feet, as if nerved into momentary strength by agony, and exclaimed with a half-shriek:

"No, no, father, curse me not. I will do all that you require of me; therefore curse me not."

He staggered to the table, and proceeded to copy the lines which had been traced by his confessor. When the task was completed, the Jesuit carefully perused the royal document. Apparently it was satisfactory, for he folded it up, and, with a slight smile, put it in his pocket.

"It is well, my son," continued he, turning to his penitent. "Heaven is merciful, and forgives. And now I will bid you farewell. And yet, ere I go, I will once more raise my hands not to curse you, but to bless. Mi fili, benedico te!"

He left the room as he spoke. Philip gazed after him with an agonized eye.

"He has blessed me," muttered he to himself, "but will Heaven bless me? It were sacrilege to doubt it. Yet that man, that Alberoni, had served me faithfully, and I abandon him. God help me! My brain reels under the pressure of these constant doubts, and this crown of Spain, so dishonestly won,

and dishonestly worn, will in the end work out its own judgment, and drive its unhappy wearer to idiocy or the grave."

And the poor King, exhausted in mind and body, once more sank back in his chair, and abandoned himself to a paroxysm of uncontrollable sorrow.

CHAPTER XVI.

RETRIBUTION.

We must change the scene to another room in the palace—that of the Cardinal-minister. It was the fourth of December, and about five in the afternoon. The early shadows of a winter's night were already throwing themselves across the apartment, but their approach was unheeded by its solitary inmate. By the side of the brazier in the centre, sat Alberoni. He was in thought: his meditations seemed agreeable, for ever and anon a smile of triumph lightened up, for an instant, his usually somewhat heavy features.

"Thanks to the gods!" said he at length, in soliloquy, "the crisis of my fate is past, and

the fortunes of Julio Alberoni are once more in the ascendant. It was a bold venture, that imprisonment of the Pacheco. I had feared remonstrances from the grandees, doubts from the King, anger from the Queen; but my alarms, it seems, were unnecessary, for all has passed off well. It is scarcely two hours since I saw Philip. Never have I known him so gracious. And he has gone to hunt at the Pardo. Well, I too have my game to run down, and mine is the nobler prey. But two days more, and there comes on the trial of the grand chamberlain. I have already communicated with his judges, and decreed his fate. The axe shall do its work; and when the first of Spain's nobles has fallen before me, who will dare to contest my power?"

A gentle rap at the door interrupted the current of his self-congratulations.

"Ha! Who comes here?" said the proud priest, in a tone of sudden anger; "and when I had given orders not to be disturbed. Woe be to the intruder!"

As he spoke, he gave permission to enter. The door was timidly opened, and the usher in faltering accents announced that Father

D'Aubenton, the confessor of the King, desired an audience of the prime minister.

"And how is it," said Alberoni, his eyes flashing fire, "that you have dared to forget my orders? Why did you not tell him I would be alone?"

"I did—I did, your Eminence," stammered out the terrified attendant. "But the reverend father would not be controlled, and insisted on my repeating his wishes to your Eminence."

"Ha! is he so froward then?" muttered the Cardinal. "Well, sirrah," continued he, turning to the domestic, "let the priest have his will; but ere you introduce him, bring lights. It may be as well," said he to himself, "to see this man's face, for one can learn nothing from his tongue. He comes no doubt for his own ends; he shall remain for mine. He has chosen to beard the lion in his den, and, by God's truth, I will make him remember the interview. When the King returns, he will find some changes in his household—Grand Chamberlain and Confessor both gone at a blow! It is a *coup-d'état* worthy of Richelieu. But here come the lights and the man."

As he spoke, some large wax-tapers were put upon the table, and their appearance was immediately followed by that of D'Aubenton.

The bearing of the confessor was more humble than usual, his manner more insinuating, his smile more bland; and he advanced towards the prime minister with the air of a dependant, who is conscious he is intruding, and who endeavours to disarm, by the humility of his look, the reproaches which he feels he has deserved.

"A thousand pardons, your Eminence," said he, "for encroaching on your valuable time, but my reasons for seeing you were so weighty, that my anxiety has, I fear, got the better of my politeness."

Alberoni had risen as the Jesuit approached, and without asking his visitor to take a seat, remained himself standing, as if to intimate that their interview would be short. If any doubts remained upon the subject, his first words would have removed them.

"My time, father," continued he, in a tone of irritation, "whether valuable or not, is at least much occupied, and I would wish to be

alone. But it matters little: what is your business?"

"I understand, your Eminence, that a fast-sailing brigantine is about to leave Alicante for Civita Vecchia. Its passage will probably be a rapid one, and it returns immediately."

"It may be so," said the minister, coldly. "But in what am I interested in this? I am no merchant, and have no venture to put on board."

"Your Eminence might have, and I trust may have; for it is on that point I would speak with you. You did me the honour to promise me that you would recommend me to the Holy See. May I ask if you have done so?"

"At present," said Alberoni, in a tone of indifference, "such application is impossible, as the Emperor will permit no couriers of Spain or of the Pope, to pass through northern Italy."

"Exactly. I guessed that such was the reason of your Eminence's delay, and therefore it is, that on learning the approaching departure of the brigantine, I came hither to express the hope that you would embrace this for me

most happy opportunity, and send a courier to his Holiness the bearer of your kind wishes towards your servant."

"It is impossible, at present," said Alberoni, bluntly. "The King's couriers are otherwise employed."

"And when," said D'Aubenton, in a timid tone, "may I venture to hope that you will solicit in my favour?"

"That must depend upon what policy may demand for the interest of my master."

"Not at present, then?"

"Certainly not."

"But in a month, perhaps?"

"Impossible to say."

"But within a year, at least?" said the Jesuit, in a voice of the most fawning submission. "You will promise it positively within a year?"

"I will promise nothing!" said Alberoni losing his temper. "Nor, permit me to add Father D'Aubenton, will I allow even you to address to me, upon an ungrateful subject, such repeated interrogatories."

"Yet, you gave me a solemn pledge once."

"If I did, I recall it. I have changed my mind."

"Yet you did me the honour to say, that as confessor to his Majesty, I might be of service to the government even of so distinguished a statesman as the Cardinal-minister."

"Ho! ho! ho!" said Alberoni, with an insulting laugh. "I understand the language of the disciples of Loyola! There is a menace in your honeyed words. You would threaten me with the withdrawal of your protection."

D'Aubenton gave a quiet smile.

"Ay, ay!" said Alberoni, as his quick eye noted the expression of the Jesuit. "I understand those omens of the future; but the time has gone by when I heeded them. The high and mighty prince, the grandee Duke of Escalona, whom you intended to have made minister in my place, as the price of your red stockings, dies in eight-and-forty hours on the scaffold; and you," he continued, with a sneer, "you may go and give him absolution, for the King has no further need of your services."

"Yet," said D'Aubenton, meekly, "I am his Majesty's confessor."

Alberoni approached the table, seized one of the printed forms which lay upon it, filled it up with some half-dozen words, added his signature, and rang the hand-bell.

"Your reverence," said he, addressing the Jesuit, "is in error. You *were* the confessor of his Majesty, but you are so no longer. The office has been transferred to a worthier man. Here," continued he, turning to the attendant, "carry this to the Marquis of Tolosa, and tell him to register it immediately. It is the warrant which appoints the priest, Benedict Di Castro, Canon of St. Jago, to the office of confessor to his Majesty, Philip V."

"And give my respects too," said D'Aubenton, in a humble tone, "to Don Fernando Duran, and tell him that, when the warrant is ready, I shall feel grateful by his informing me, as I would not wish to remain any longer beneath a roof where I should be an intruder."

The usher departed, and the rivals were once more alone. In Alberoni's countenance there was something like astonishment. It might be, that after the frank avowal of his hostility, he had expected his companion to withdraw. It might be that he had anticipated a storm of re-

proaches, and had found only humble resignation. Whatever was the feeling, the Jesuit either did not or affected not to remark it, but sinking down in an arm-chair, he bent his head to his knees, as if borne down by the pressure of some overwhelming internal sorrow.

Some five minutes had thus elapsed, and still the silence of death was in the chamber. D'Aubenton stirred not, and Alberoni remained gazing at him, as if, like a bird fascinated by a snake, he had been unable to withdraw his eyes.

At length the usher reappeared. It was to announce from the Marquis of Tolosa that the warrant was ready.

The words seemed to dispel the momentary paralysis of the Jesuit, and he rose from his chair; but the manner and the man had changed. No longer stooping, humble, and timid, he seemed to have assumed the embodiment of a new form. His person was drawn up to its full height, his eyes flashed, his lip curled,—his whole expression that of an avenging angel about to announce to the evil their doom.

"Julio Alberoni," said he, as he advanced

with a slow and haughty step towards the astonished minister, "I come to bid you farewell. For five long years have I been your companion in this kingdom and in this house. By my influence you partly rose to power. By my influence have you been mainly supported in it; and how have I been repaid? You assured me of honours to which my rank, my mind, my services gave me a just title, and you failed me. Again, a second time, when you found my support necessary to your existence, you renewed the pledge, and a second time you have broken it. Well, if you have been false to your promises, I will be true to mine. In this room, on this spot, three weeks ago, I warned you, that if you again deceived me, the treachery should prove your ruin; and now I keep my word."

He clapped his hands as he spoke. The door instantly opened, and an officer, at the head of some dozen soldiers of the royal guard, entered the room.

"Amenzaga," said the Jesuit to their leader, for the Cardinal was still speechless from astonishment, "arrest that man for treason."

"And by what warrant?" said Alberoni,

haughtily, for his high spirit had returned to him.

"By this," returned the Jesuit, drawing a paper from his bosom. "It is in the handwriting of his Majesty, and the signature of the King is attested by that of the under secretary of state, the Marquis of Tolosa."

"But there must be some mistake here," said Alberoni. "My gracious master must have been in error. I must see the King."

"The twig is well limed," said the Jesuit, coldly; "but the snare was foreseen, and was prepared against. His Majesty has gone to the Pardo."

"But surely," said the hapless minister, clinging, in his agony, like a drowning man to a straw, "time will be given me for explanations."

"Time—to you!" said the confessor, in a tone of bitter mockery. "Did you give time to Anne de la Trémouille?"

Scarcely were the words uttered, when the Cardinal staggered as if from a heavy blow, and sinking down in a chair, pressed his hand to his forehead, muttering to himself, in a low voice:

"It is the judgment of God! I have sinned, and the retribution is just."

But his attendants paid little respect to his sufferings or his penitence. A sedan-chair, which had apparently been brought to the gallery on purpose, was introduced into the room. The minister was placed within it, and carried down-stairs. There was no resistance. From the moment of the mention of the name of his ancient patroness, Alberoni seemed paralyzed, and submitted listlessly, and it might be unconsciously, to the acts of his attendants. At the door below stood a carriage in waiting, surrounded by a body of light cavalry. The prisoner was placed within, Amenzaga took the seat by his side, and in a few minutes the late redoubted minister of Spain had left, and for ever, the scene of his short-lived greatness.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OLD WOMAN'S GRATITUDE.

It was about two hours after the events which we have related, that Clifford was seated in his room in the Calle de la Cabeza. He was in deep anxiety. Since his conference with D'Aubenton, he had heard nothing of the doings of the Jesuit. Of the determination of the priest to accomplish what he had undertaken, he entertained no doubts. He was too well acquainted with the energy of the man, with his selfish nature, with his vindictive spirit. The absence of intelligence, too, proved no absence of action, for he knew the secresy which ever marked the movements of the disciples of Loyola. Yet how far had the confessor advanced? Had he

spoken to the King of Alberoni? Had he succeeded in obtaining the order for his removal? or if obtained, would it be obeyed? Such were some of the thoughts which chased each other in turn across the brain of the young envoy, and each threw a fresh shadow over his brow as it passed; for how much depended upon the result!—the success of his diplomacy, the triumph of his love, the life of his new-found relative. Exhausted at length by the agitating character of his reflections, he sat in his room moody and silent.

All at once a bell was heard at the outer door. The cautious landlord, as was his wont, answered it in person, and immediately after entered the room. He placed a letter on the table and retired. With palpitating heart did Clifford examine the missive. It was addressed, like those of Therese, "To the Señor Zuniga," but the handwriting was unknown to him. He opened it. The contents were comprised in a single line: "*Vicit Leo ex tribu Judæ.*"

Clifford sprang to his feet. It was the signal agreed upon between him and D'Aubenton; the private motto of the Jesuits, which they had borrowed from the Templars, and

which typified so well the ambition and the power of the military monks, and their still more aspiring successors.

"What!" said the young soldier to himself, "can I believe my eyes? Is the great event really over? And how has it been accomplished? What says D'Aubenton?"

And again he betook himself to the letter, but he sought in vain for further information in its pages. Too anxious to remain in doubt, he snatched up his cloak and hat, and hurried to the palace. As he passed through the Puerta del Sol, he observed in every quarter anxious groups collected, discussing in low muttered tones some apparently important intelligence. He waited not to mix with them, but with accelerated steps hastened towards the royal residence.

As he approached it, he observed, collected round a side-door, a somewhat larger number of loungers than ordinary, and thither he made his way. He had no difficulty in recognizing the portal—it was the same by which he had made his exit on the night of his journey to Segovia, and it was that too which had so lately witnessed the departure of the Cardinal.

In front, stood two or three of the royal domestics, who, in low tones and with many an interjection of terror and astonishment, were detailing to their gossips, who had congregated from every part of Madrid, the astounding news. Clifford mingled with the crowd, and from the narrative, intended for other ears, learned the full success of the plot.

The Jesuit had triumphed then, and the great minister of Spain had fallen. His ruin had been the object of Clifford's mission and his warmest aspirations; and yet now that the Colossus was in the dust—such are the inconsistencies of human nature—the tale of ruin was listened to with a sigh. The unquestioned talents of the Cardinal, his energy, his ambition—the mind which had raised him from the lowest dregs of society, and placed him on a level with its greatest princes—had often excited, and long before they met, Clifford's admiration.

His genial manners, too, at the supper-table, his flattering offers of advancement, and, even after their rejection, his generosity (for Clifford could not help confessing to himself, that when death might have been justly awarded to the

agent of a private enterprise, mere confinement in a royal castle was generosity), all had aided to create in his bosom a liking for the man. It was therefore with something of a feeling of choking in the throat that he left the Palace, and turned his steps towards the residence of the grand chamberlain.

He no longer, however, sought the garden-door—all danger from recognition was over. He made his way direct to the great gate, and asked for José. The old man answered the summons at once, though his eye expressed somewhat like astonishment on seeing Clifford. His cautious, self-possessed temperament, however, gave no utterance to his feelings in words; and with the air of one who had never before seen the visitor, he received his instructions. They were simply to the effect that Don Carlos Zuniga requested an interview with Donna Teresa Pacheco.

It is needless to tell our fair readers that the boon was instantly conceded; and in another minute the lovers were in each other's arms.

"Oh, Charles!" said the blushing girl, as she gently withdrew herself from Clifford's

embrace, "you here—and by the great gate! What folly!—what madness!—what danger!"

"None, love," said her companion. "The danger is past—the Cardinal has fallen."

"Impossible—incredible!" said she. "And you smile! Ah, cruel!" continued Therese, as the tears started to her eyes; "is this a subject for mockery?"

"By heavens, love!" said her companion, as he passed his arms tenderly round her, "I speak the truth. Our great enemy has gone!"

"And whither?"

"To Pampeluna—to France—never to return."

"And my dear grandfather then is free?"

"Not yet, love; but he will probably be so to-morrow. In the meantime, however, his life is safe."

"And you, Charles—dear Charles, you have done all this! What does not he—what do not we all owe you? Ah, how can we ever repay you!"

Clifford took her hand, and whispered something in her ear. What the words were is not

upon record; but they must have been eloquent, for Therese cast down her eyes, and blushed and smiled, and was comforted.

For two long hours did the lovers interchange their congratulations on the past, and their hopes and fears for the future. Then were discussed the pride of the old noble, his strong prejudices in favour of Castilian blood, his affection for his grandchild, his passionate love for his mother's family, his probable gratitude to his preserver. Each topic was canvassed in its turn; but apparently their prospects of happiness did not brighten as they analysed them, for insensibly the faces of both saddened, and tears stood in Therese's eyes. At length, the great clock of St. Isidro chimed the hour of eight. It seemed to recall to Clifford's recollection that he had other duties to perform, for he started to his feet. Once more the hands touched each other, the lips met in one long, sad embrace, and, in another minute, Therese was alone.

The envoy had returned to his solitary quarters. As soon as he arrived there, he proceeded to devote himself to that duty which, had he been a perfect diplomatist, should have

been first attended to—he wrote to Lord Stanhope and Dubois an account of the successful issue of his mission. He added, that if his conduct had given satisfaction to his superiors, he should feel grateful for a six months' leave of absence, as he had found relatives in Madrid, and was anxious to spend some time in their society. This done, he betook himself to his couch, and, for the first time for many a long night, enjoyed undisturbed repose.

At an early hour on the following morning, the King and Queen returned from the Pardo. The country was without a government, and it was necessary to find, and at once, a successor to the displaced minister. Elizabeth Farnese, anxious to obey literally the wishes of the allies, selected for the office a subject of Spain, the Marquis Grimaldi; and as such an administration could only exist by the general support of the grandees, orders were immediately given for the liberation of the Duke of Escalona from his captivity; and Clifford was selected for the pleasing duty of announcing to him his freedom.

For this he was indebted to the good offices of the Assa Feta. Laura Pescatori was to the

last degree susceptible. Ever thinking of love herself, she had the most entire sympathy for others in affairs of the heart. With a woman's quickness of perception, she had at once divined the affection which existed between Clifford and Therese, and she determined to lend her aid to its happy *dénouement*. She would, probably, from the kindly eye with which she looked upon all flirtations, have done so under any circumstances that chanced to bring one under her notice, but upon the present occasion her energies in the cause of Cupid were increased twenty-fold by the sudden liking which she had formed for the young soldier.

Clifford had preserved her pearl necklace and her life, and for both benefits Laura was not ungrateful, for she was attached to existence, and adored jewellery. But her preserver had a merit in her eyes, far beyond his skill as a swordsman: he was remarkably handsome; and the Assa Feta, who like Henry VIII. loved to look on a man, decided in her own mind that no position was too lofty for so excellent a specimen of humanity. She determined, therefore, to make his fortune. Of Donna Teresa's

future prospects, as the first heiress in Spain she was well aware, but with the shrewdness of a woman of the world, she doubted how far the affection of Therese, however impassioned it might be, would be considered by the haughty head of the house of Pacheco as a sufficient reason for giving his assent to the match. She had therefore employed her busy brain in a thousand devices, as to the means of making the old noble the debtor of the youth who was the aspirant to his grandchild. Her suspicions and her wishes had been freely communicated to her royal mistress, and Elizabeth Farnese had entered, nothing loth into the plans of her attendant.

In fact, the Queen, for her own sake, gladly listened to suggestions which tallied so exactly with her private interests. The Cardinal had fallen, and the price had been paid to the allies for the promised principality. But there was an old adage, "the cup and the lip." Much might still interfere between the guarantee of the appanage to Don Carlos, and its possession. France and England might hesitate, might be treacherous, might refuse. It was important, therefore, to her to secure in favour of her plans

the zealous co-operation of their representative. If she gratified Colonel Clifford, it was natural to suppose that he would do his best to gratify her; and how could his services be better repaid than by a marriage with the wealthiest match in Spain? If the suspicions of her nurse were correct, the lady's wishes on the subject could scarcely be doubted; those of the gentleman were undeniable; the only difficulty to be apprehended would arise from the grand chamberlain. But the duke was in captivity. His enemy had, it is true, fallen; but the charge of treason, if a fact, was in no degree affected by the change of a prime minister. He might still be brought to trial for his life, and, as before, the opinion of the judges might go against him. It would be good policy then to make not merely his freedom, but his restoration to rank, honours, and position, a concession to the wishes of the representative of the allied powers.

Upon this thought the Queen acted. Shortly after her return to the palace, on the morning of the sixth, Clifford was again summoned to an interview. With that fascinating manner which Elizabeth Farnese could so well command

at pleasure, she informed him of the fall of the Cardinal, enlarged upon her anxiety to give immediate effect to the wishes of the allies, and requested his aid in obtaining the speedy investiture of Don Carlos in the duchies. This was at once frankly promised, and with the air of a man who intended to bear out his assertions.

"It is well, Colonel Clifford," said the Queen, in the tone of one who was content with her visitor; "you have promised to do your best for the furtherance of my wishes; it is but fair that I, in my turn, should repay the obligation. I owe you a double debt for Donna Laura and myself. In what manner can I discharge it?"

Clifford was silent.

"If you," said the Queen, smiling, "will not even hint to me a mode of satisfying my obligations, I must be allowed, though it is but ill-guessing in the dark, to suggest one. Donna Laura tells me that she met you in the park of the Casa del Campo, in company with Donna Teresa Pacheco."

"Your Majesty is right," said Clifford,

colouring deeply. "Donna Teresa is my relative. My mother was a Zuniga."

"Of what family?" said the Queen, interrogatively.

"A daughter, Madam, of the Duke of Bejar."

"Nothing could be more fortunate," said the Queen; "and what you tell me only gives strength to my original idea. You are aware that the grand chamberlain is at present in Segovia on a charge of high treason. I know not if it be well founded; but true or not, the King, my husband, estimates so highly the services he has received at your hands, that he is willing, should you demand it, to restore at your request, your relative to freedom and to his former rank and honours."

"Ah, Madam!" said Clifford, dropping on one knee, "how well you read my thoughts! How shall I express my gratitude?"

"It is unnecessary: it is I who am still your debtor. I have to repay you for the protection which your gallantry afforded to Donna Laura. But of this," continued she, with a smile, "we will speak hereafter. In the meantime,

the duke's pardon shall be made out, though with but slight allusion to the fact of your kind intercession in his favour. It may be as well," she added, "that he should not learn till we meet how much he really owes you. You know the pride of our aged friend; and the information from a fair lady's lips will be less galling than if blazoned on the pages of a state paper. But it will do no harm if you be the bearer of the joyful intelligence. In an hour, therefore, hold yourself in readiness at the apartments of the Marquis of Tolosa. You will there find the necessary documents complete, and a royal carriage to convey you to Segovia Nay," continued she, as Clifford would have spoken, "you are entitled to the honour, for are you not in fact an ambassador? And now have you aught else to ask of me?"

"Madam," said Clifford, colouring deeply, "I have already taxed your Majesty's kindness too highly; but as you encourage me to prefer a petition, I will make it."

"And what is that?"

"You have granted freedom to one state prisoner; may I solicit it for another?"

"And who may that be?"

"He is at your feet, Madam: I too am the captive of your Majesty."

The Queen laughed, then coloured, and then shook her fan.

"It is well," continued she, "that Donna Teresa Pacheco did not hear what she might have misinterpreted. To speak seriously, I have been told of your adventures, and will do what I am sure the young lady will heartily approve —free you from your bondage to me. You will find the necessary papers for assuring your liberty, as well as the duke's, at Don Fernando Duran's. And now, I wish you a pleasant journey, and for the present bid you adieu."

She extended her hand as she spoke; Clifford kissed the fair fingers respectfully, and with a profound obeisance, left the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

The shades of evening were falling fast, when, on the afternoon of the same day which had witnessed his interview with the Queen, Clifford reached Segovia. As the carriage passed under the arched gateway which led to the court-yard, the traveller could not help contrasting the circumstances of his present visit with his last. Then a prisoner, his mission defeated, his love hopeless, how gloomy had been his anticipations of the future! Scarcely a month had since elapsed, and yet how many important events had been crowded within its limits. The prime minister of Spain, whose mere

smile had given happiness, and whose word was law, was himself an exile; and he, the young aspirant to political distinctions, who had been sent at his bidding to swell the list of captives, was in his turn the court favourite and the cynosure of neighbouring eyes.

Even his love, in which there was still so much uncertain, presented brighter prospects. He had made the acquaintance of Therese's grandsire; nay more, he had been the fortunate means of preserving his wealth, his liberty, perhaps his life. Difficulties might no doubt arise; but still there was hope that the services he had rendered might soften the old man's prejudices. It was with a flushed cheek, therefore, and a throbbing heart, that Clifford made his way to the chamber of the Duke of Escalona.

It is easy to imagine the joy of their meeting; and yet the grand chamberlain received the favourable intelligence with more calmness than might have been expected. To one so stout-hearted, the mere chances of death had brought but little terror. What presented themselves in more gloomy colours to his imagination were the loss of his rank, the

attainder of his blood, and most of all the charge of disloyalty against a race proverbial for being loyal. Still, the many changes in his eventful life had taught him philosophy, and he bore his good as he had borne his evil-fortune, with the composure of a resolute and self-sustained nature.

Yet his visitor was not the less welcome. Many were the inquiries made with regard to the details of the plot which had terminated so happily—for it had been thought best, for fear of accidents, to risk no communication with the old noble—and many were the questions asked with regard to his darling grandchild. The subject was pleasing to both parties, and on it Clifford spoke eloquently. He detailed in his happiest language the anxiety of Therese for her grandsire's safety; their meetings at the Palace of Escalona, and the Casa del Campo; the death of Perez and Ambrosio; his fruitless interview with the Queen; the drunkenness of Di Castro; the fortunate seizure of the pocket-book; the indignation of the confessor; the result.

"All's well that ends well," said the duke, as

the story was completed. "And so the Parmesan is gone at last. But for that, I fear me the house of Pacheco would have had a blot on its escutcheon; and to you, my boy, I owe it for having saved our hitherto spotless shield from such a calamity."

Clifford would have disclaimed the honour paid him, and awarded it to Therese; but the grand chamberlain would not listen to him.

"No, no," said he, "the girl is a dear child, and loves her old grandfather well; and no doubt she aided your escape down the rock. But after all, she did but plan, it was you that executed; and where should I have been now, but for your interview with D'Aubenton and the Queen, and most of all for your having liberated that old woman, the Assa Feta, from the clutches of the Pimental? Well, your diplomacy has not been amiss; but to say the truth, I have been a soldier half my life, and I would rather have seen that passage of arms with Don Ambrosio, than witnessed the no doubt dexterous manner in which you bamboozled the Jesuit and Elizabeth Farnese. By my honour, lad,

but you must be a good swordsman; for the scoundrel hidalgo was a neighbour of ours of old, and he had the reputation of being as skilful with his weapon as any man in Spain. Well, to-morrow we shall go back to Madrid, and then I will give you better quarters than I have been able to afford you in this tumble-down castle of King Alonzo; for it is a settled thing that you take up your residence with me at the palace of Escalona."

Clifford was silent.

"What, lad!" continued the duke, "you do not hesitate upon the subject? But you fear the formality of an old man's residence. *Vaya.* You shall have a barrack of your own, and come and go just as you please."

Still Clifford made no answer. Yet it was evident that his mind was busy, for he looked agitated, and a sudden paleness came over his features.

The grand chamberlain marked the change with alarm.

"What ails you, lad?" said he, hurriedly, "are you ill? Speak."

"Yes," said Clifford, at length, with an

effort," I will speak, and it is best that I should speak now. Before I knew your Excellency, even before I was acquainted with Donna Teresa's name or rank, I loved her, and I love her still. Judge then, if I should be a welcome guest in the house of her grandfather!"

The old man's face suddenly became grave, and he leaned back in his chair, as if for the moment, his breathing had become difficult.

Fool that I was!" muttered he to himself, " not to have thought of this, not to have suspected it; and yet to any but a dolt—a madman —an idiot, the Bocca Chica, and the rock beneath, and most of all, the scene in the banqueting-room, might have taught me the lesson. Well, boy," continued he, turning to Clifford, and in a tone which though cold, had in it nothing of anger, " I blame you not. I blame but myself, who gave my sanction to the silly plottings of that romantic old fool, the Princess of Ursins. But still," continued he, with something like embarrassment, " I had formed other plans for Therese, and you will not think me ungrateful if I decline to sacrifice the castle-

building of years, in favour of one who but yesterday was a stranger. No, I will not ask you to be my guest, but I honour you for your frankness, boy; and in all matters but this you will find me your warm friend. But we will speak no more upon a painful subject, and so to bed."

He shook Clifford's hand as he spoke, but the young soldier was scarcely conscious of the act. The blow had been not altogether unexpected, and yet when it came, it paralyzed him, and half stupefied he retired to his chamber to pass a sleepless night.

On the following morning the two relatives returned together to Madrid, but the manner of both was constrained. The conversation languished; Therese was not even alluded to; and on entering the city, Clifford left the carriage, and proceeded on foot to his own quarters, there to ponder upon the instability of human felicity.

The old noble stood once more in the halls of his fathers, yet he too was no happy man. His grandchild had hurried to his arms; a few minutes served to make her acquainted with the events which had taken place—the declara-

tion of her lover and his rejection—and her companionship also became, in its turn, the subject of embarrassment to her grandfather. Neither, indeed, alluded to the topic, but the moistened eyelid of the young girl, and her saddened air, told their own tale. His paternal mansion, hitherto the source of so many agreeable associations to Don John Pacheco, became positively distasteful.

At the Palace, things went even worse. His old rank of grand chamberlain had been restored to him, but along with it came its duties. The office required perpetual attendance upon Philip and his ambitious helpmate; and the latter never failed to descant upon the excellent qualities of his young relative, nor did she hesitate to inform him that he had been freed from thraldom and all the disgrace of a trial, at the request of, and as a special mark of favour to, the representative of the allied powers.

Some few days after, her Majesty touched upon ground even less agreeable. Clifford had been summoned to a private interview on matters connected with his mission. His sadness had not escaped the Queen's eye; and with her

accustomed tact and perseverance, she had speedily elicited the secret in all its varied incidents—from his first meeting with Therese down to the expression of his hopes and their rejection.

Elizabeth Farnese was interested. The romance of the story attracted her. A woman's feelings (ever disposed to look favourably on affairs of the heart) suggested her kindly interference, but chiefly was she forced into activity by the never-failing pertinacity of Donna Laura. That mature admirer of handsome young men was not, as we have mentioned, disposed to be ungrateful to the handsomest of her acquaintance, and she took up Clifford's cause zealously. A grandee of Spain may oppose with success a prime minister—his contest is hopeless with a Queen's favourite waiting-woman. The poor Duke of Escalona was attacked at every turn.

If he appeared before the King, his Majesty dilated on the diplomatic abilities of Colonel Clifford. If he ventured into the presence of her Majesty, Elizabeth Farnese never failed to call to his recollection that she was indebted to the envoy for the investiture of the duchies, and

spoke in no ambiguous terms of her intention to employ, in his behalf, the unlimited powers of her patronage. As for Donna Laura, with that Doric simplicity of language for which she was so distinguished, and with which she favoured alike king and grandee, she told the haughty head of the Pachecos that he was an old fool, without either sense or gratitude; for if he had had sense, he would have gladly wedded his heiress to a man who was something like a man; and if he had had gratitude, he would not have turned the cold shoulder on one, to whom his grandchild was indebted for her honour, and himself for his head.

The duke was made of tough materials, but the hardest substances suffer from perpetual hammering, and even his obstinacy began to give way before such repeated attacks. At length he adopted a desperate resolution, and stated his own view of the case to the Queen, in the hope of winning her sympathy. Alas! he gained nothing by his suit. The mind, the manners, the talents, the gallantry of Clifford were all, her Majesty pronounced, with the air of one who brooked not contradiction, such as

any man might be proud of in a son-in-law. Nor did his birth form an objection. Clifford's English parentage was noble, and his Castilian descent as distinguished as any in Spain. That he had no title was true, but that mattered little; Donna Teresa was the sole heir of the grand chamberlain, and by the custom of her country would inherit not only the estates, but the grandeeships of the Duke of Escalona. She consequently would lose nothing of her position by the marriage; and as to her husband, he, as a matter of course, according to the universal law of Spanish peerages, would share the rank and dignities of his wife.

The poor grand chamberlain was thus driven from his last stronghold, and the more easily, as the worthy man had not only to struggle against his enemies without, but his feelings within. The tears of his granddaughter naturally had their influence; but what was not less effective, was the success of his new-found relative. Alas! how much of our affection depends upon our vanity. Clifford had become at the Spanish court the observed of all observers. His beauty found favour in

the eyes of the women; his gallantry and bold bearing in those of the men; but most of all, in a country where the smiles of a court confer distinction, the openly-marked attentions of the King and Queen secured him universal homage. Nobles and secretaries of state bent respectfully before him. Nay, the very grand chamberlain found himself eclipsed in what he had hitherto been in the habit of considering as his own peculiar orbit. He had no choice, therefore, but to swim with the current, and consent to receive for his child, the addresses of the young man, whom all the world so unanimously pronounced worthy to be the father of the future Pachecos. The result may be guessed at. Clifford once more received an invitation to the palace of Escalona.

So far the loves of the young couple prospered, but the impetuous temper of Donna Laura did not permit her to stop half-way in her patronage. At her instigation, the Queen continued her solicitations with the grand chamberlain, till at length he was prevailed on to fix a day for the marriage.

It took place in the church of Atocha, and

with all the magnificence with which the Catholic religion loves to surround the ceremonies of her creed. The Archbishop of Toledo pronounced the blessing, the King gave the bride away, and afterwards, with Elizabeth Farnese, honoured with his presence the nuptial banquet which the Duke had provided for the auspicious occasion.

For seven long days the festivities continued with little intermission, and then, and not till then, were Clifford and Therese permitted to retire to the happiness and the quiet of their married home.

Our tale has found its close, and little now remains to be added to the narrative.

To give precedence to royalty; Philip continued to live, as he had lived, the slave alternately, to use the phrase of Alberoni, "of a woman and a breviary." As time passed on, however, his superstitious terrors increased, and, some few years after the period we have described, he carried out the scheme of devotion which his bigoted imagination had suggested, and like his forefather, the Emperor Charles, resigned his crown to his son, and retired to a

monastery. But his anchorite existence was not destined to be long-lived. The young heir, Don Lewis, died shortly after his elevation to his new honours, and the unhappy Philip was once more dragged back by his ambitious wife to an ungrateful throne.

As for Elizabeth Farnese; if happiness be the result of gratified wishes, she should have been happy; for she not only obtained for Don Carlos the investiture of the coveted duchies, but she saw die successively the three children of her predecessor, the hated Savoyarde, and her own son become heir to Spain and the Indies. Yet, if history is to be believed, her lot, after all, was little to be envied. Her power, as our readers well know, depended upon the hourly espial kept on the words and acts of her husband; but the toil was unremitting, and her health and spirits sunk at length beneath it; for the perpetual guardianship had entailed upon the gaoler, a slavery as galling as that inflicted on her bondsman.

D'Aubenton, as far as worldly prosperity went, was less fortunate. The oft-promised Cardinal's hat once more eluded his touch; and

he died as he had lived, one of those extraordinary men whom Fortune sometimes brings upon the world's stage as its playthings; and who, while able to wreck governments and control the fate of empires, seem powerless to command for themselves those prizes of life, which, almost unsought, fall to their less gifted fellows.

Alberoni, on leaving Spain, took refuge in Italy, but he never recovered his former influence. Yet even in age, when the reality of royalty had escaped his grasp, he clung to its shadow, and spent his latter days in endeavouring to regain for the Stuarts their forfeited throne.

His companion, Di Castro, led a happier existence. He had, indeed, in consequence of his excess on that fatal night on which he lost the pocket-book, been dismissed by Donna Violante. But the revenues of his canonry of St. Jago were ample, and, by a double devotion to his favourite Valdepenas, he endeavoured to console himself, and not unsuccessfully, for the abandonment of his quondam penitent. As for the fair dame herself, her conduct had met

with so little approval, that she was compelled to quit the house which had so long been her home; but the sentence of banishment was made less bitter by the accompaniment of a handsome annuity. As she got older, she hesitated for awhile between ratifia and religion; but the Church carried the day, and she took a young monk for her confessor. It was the mode in which elderly dames in the Peninsula cultivated devotion.

We have but a few more words to add, and these naturally refer to the principal persons in our story. About three years after the events we have narrated, the grand chamberlain was gathered to his fathers, and was succeeded in his honours and estates by his grandchild. The young duke and duchess (for Clifford, in accordance with the rule of the Spanish peerage, had been raised to his wife's rank, and bore her title) mourned long and sincerely over the grave of their kind old relative. Their further lives it is unnecessary to relate. To say that they were never unchequered would not be true; for where is the human lot that has not its black bean as well as its white? But if hap-

piness is to be estimated according to the measure dealt out to frail mortality, there have been few unions more deserving to be envied than that of Charles Clifford and Therese de Chalais.

THE END.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.